

# South of the Garden

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

Volume 40, Number 3

September 2019

## Gifts

by Rebecca Welper

I picked up that timeless classic *Gift From the Sea* on my honeymoon in Hawaii and was immediately transported by the beautiful, inspiring writing. Five years later, I'm left with these impressions: cobwebs in the corners of a summer cottage that Anne Morrow Lindbergh sweeps away as she enters her retreat from daily life (including five children); her mind and spirit unwinding, mirroring the swirls in shells found on the beach; and most vividly, I recall the expanses of quiet that gave her space to think her own thoughts and time to write. Whenever I visit the ocean, I try to receive some of those precious gifts from the sea.

Some impressions from my recent trip to the beach: a sore hip from an old rugby injury making it impossible to sit comfortably on the sand; an exhibitionist disturbing diners at a crowded beach restaurant (with the dubious defense, "I was just scratching my balls!"); the deafening roar of fighter jets on their endless exercises from the naval base nearby, punctuating the already overstimulating sights and sounds of tourists at the beach. So much for gifts from the sea.

I know I have a problem with gratitude. Meaning, I can't always summon it. What comes easily is comparing myself to others (usually unfavorably). But maybe I should avoid comparisons with multi-millionaires like the Lindberghs (who surely had plenty of hired help for their brood of children). I mean, do I really envy their political legacy as isolationists and Nazi sympathizers during World War II? And how could anyone wish to lose a child, as they did when their first son was kidnapped and killed before his second birthday? Plus, it turns out their marriage was pretty rocky. I'll try not to be too hard on myself for having a less-than-transformational trip to the sea.

I know our brains have a negativity bias, and that even just trying to find things to be grateful for has a positive effect on our brain's wiring and overall happiness and health. I just have to make myself do it, like remembering to take my vitamins and finding slices of time to do any movement that passes as exercise. So, here are some gifts I did receive from the sea: spending time with my dad and his girlfriend, enjoying getting to know her and watching the two of them have fun together; borrowing their boogie board and feeling the awesome power and joy of the ocean waves; digging in the sand with my three-year-old and watching her get braver in approaching the water; having classic summer fun with my hubby and kiddo on the boardwalk, with carnival rides, dripping ice cream and all.

Phew, that wasn't so hard. Finding peace during this less-than-peaceful phase of my life is essential, and it becomes easier when I can do it in community. Won't you join me this fall at RCWMS, at a workshop, retreat, or festival? Let's all enjoy the gifts of life together.

Rebecca Welper is the RCMWS Development Director.



## Rise Up

by Christine Houghton

Bodies that menstruate, birth, nurse. Bodies that grieve and sacrifice. Bodies that are infertile. Bodies that are taken advantage of and mistreated. Bodies fighting for survival. Bodies that are broken and sacred. Women's bodies.

My favorite part of Katey Zeh's book *Women Rise Up* is that she repeatedly highlights an aspect of the Christian faith that is too often forgotten: its relationship to the human body. Ironic for a people who equate God's taking on a human form as the ultimate symbol of love and liberation. And yet, there remains in our present context a discomfort with bodies. With "ambiguous" bodies, vulnerable bodies, differently-abled bodies, sensual, sexual bodies and, yes, with women's bodies.

I began Zeh's book reluctant to return to biblical analysis at all. Since graduate school, I have only returned to scripture a handful of times. But, I love the RCWMS, so I leaned in to the challenge. Gradually, I opened up to the possibility that engaging with these biblical stories may prove illuminating somehow. Sure enough, by chapter two, when Zeh implicates our broken maternal healthcare system in the story of Rachel's death after giving birth to Benjamin, I was underlining and starring sections with increasing frequency and ferocity. Her comparison of present-day patriarchal norms with the confined spaces that women like Ruth, Hannah, and Mary Magdalene inhabited summoned my own experiences and got me a little riled up.

As I have alluded, I identify as a woman and was socialized as one. My white privilege has offered opportunity throughout my life, and I have also been vulnerable to the pervasive cultural definition of, focus of, and expectations of, inhabiting a "female" body. Zeh identifies many of the messages that women throughout history have received, resisted, and been formed by. She illuminates the ways in which biblical women step into vulnerability by showing up as embodied beings: the hemorrhaging woman entering a public space despite stigma that she is unclean; Hannah mourning her infertility before God (I love when Zeh wonders, "What if, instead of feeling apologetic for our tears, we claimed them as sacred?"); and the story of the unnamed "sinful" woman in the Gospel of Luke who anoints Jesus' feet with oil in a moment of intimacy. There is profound wisdom, resilience, and presence in these stories of women—and they are so often glossed over by stories of men in power.

As a Duke Divinity School student, I was uncomfortably embodied. My pregnancy was confirmed the week before my first day. I was nauseated and fatigued, and the smell of the Refectory's entrees eventually became unbearable. I had to learn to lean into the discomfort not only of acid reflux but also of the reality that pregnancy was not normal there. It was awkward to have silkier hair, accentuated curves, and an external validation that "yes, I've had sex." One person, whose

(Continued on back.)

# Calendar

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

September 14, 2019, Saturday, 9:00 am–3:00 pm  
FINDING YOUR PURPOSE: Listening for Meaning in the Noise of Everyday Life

Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill, NC

An opportunity for undergraduates from all denominations to explore how to connect spiritual life with everyday life. Workshops: The Enneagram Journey to Self Discovery, Centering Prayer, The Sound of Your Genuine, Not All Who Wander are Lost: Finding Your True North, and What is a Spiritual Practice.

Sponsors: Chapel of the Cross & the Lilly Endowment  
Contact: [findingyourpurpose.squarespace.com/](http://findingyourpurpose.squarespace.com/)

\*September 21, 2019, 10:00 am–12:00 noon

FALL INTO WRITING

RCWMS Office, 1202 Watts St., Durham, NC

Fall is the perfect time to get back into a writing practice, or to begin one for the first time. We'll write from prompts inspired by the changing seasons, allowing us to let go of the intensity of summer days and embrace the change, balance, and acceptance that fall offers. We'll write together, share in community, and offer each other tips and practices for keeping up a writing practice amidst our busy lives.

Leader: Rebecca Welper, MFA

Cost: \$10–\$25

Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*September 22–29, 2019

A WEEK OF QUIET & WRITING FOR WOMEN

Pelican House, Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC

Wouldn't you like a week full of quiet days to think and write? Come spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women at the beautiful Trinity Center on Emerald Isle, NC. We observe silence in the daytime so participants can read, write, or rest. In the evenings we gather to reflect on the day and share our work with one another. Everyone gets her own room. Her own space. Her own time.

Cost: \$800, includes lodging and meals

Contact: [jeanette@rcwms.org](mailto:jeanette@rcwms.org)

\*September 28, 2019, Saturday, 12:00–4:00 pm

GET YOUR BEST NIGHT'S SLEEP EVER! A Sounder Sleep System® Workshop

2726 Croasdaile Dr., Ste. 210, Durham, NC

Learn to work with the wisdom and rhythms of your own living, breathing body to create more peaceful awake time, more pleasurable approach to sleep, and more restful and restorative sleep.

Leader: Betty Wolfe, MDiv, BCB, GCFPcm, authorized Sounder Sleep System Teacher

Cost: \$75 before Sept. 25; \$95 after Sept. 25

Contact: [bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com](mailto:bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com), 919-794-4139

\*October 3–4, 2019, Thursday 3:30 pm–Friday 3:30 pm

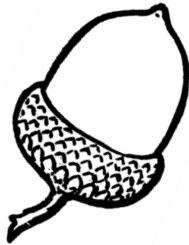
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival

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

From an opening reception, to vibrant worship, to insightful workshops, to intentional conversations, this year's NC Women's Preaching Festival will live into the theme "Proclamation in the Breech" as we honor the voices of courageous women.

Cost: \$70 (\$10 for students)

Contact: [www.ncwomenpreaching.com](http://www.ncwomenpreaching.com)



October 23–25, 2019

WOMEN IN MINISTRY CONFERENCE: Leadership in a Time of Division & Fear

Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ

A conference for women church leaders (clergy and lay) who work within the church and beyond. Gather to worship, study, and encourage one another.

Leaders: Emilie Townes, Cynthia Rigby, Mihee Kim-Kort  
Cost: \$195 (program and meals)

Contact: [wimconference.ptsem.edu](http://wimconference.ptsem.edu)

\*October 26, Saturday, 10:00 am–4:00 pm

PONDERING, PAINTING & PLANTING PEACE POLES

The Stable (between Durham & Hillsborough, NC)

Spend a day creating a Peace Pole for your yard, garden, or community. The Peace Pole movement started in Japan in response to the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We will create our own Peace Poles in an array of colors with messages of peace or our own quotes, prayers, or poetry.

Leader: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer, artist, long-time wanderer, and leader of retreats.

Fee: \$150 (materials peace pole, lunch, & snacks)

Contact: 919-306-2919 or [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com)

\*November 5, 2019, 2:00 pm

READING from *The Last Straw* by Bryant Holsenbeck

McIntyre's Books, Fearington Village, Pittsboro, NC

Contact: [fearington.com/events/category/author-event/](http://fearington.com/events/category/author-event/)

\*November 16, 2019, Saturday, 9:00 am–4:30 pm

ART DAY BY THE HAW RIVER with Sue Sneddon

A beautiful studio in Saxapahaw, NC

Let's go with the flow! Bring your favorite art supplies to capture the beauty of the Haw River. Sue will demonstrate some techniques and offer one-on-one assistance to help you reach your desired effects. Some pastel and watercolor supplies will be available.

Leader: Sue Sneddon has been a full-time painter since 1984. Her work reveals an abiding interest in nature in all its forms, especially the play of light on water. She lives at the NC coast.

Sponsors: RCWMS and mahaloArts

Cost: \$100. Bring your own lunch or yummy options will be available (for free & for purchase).

Contact: Alison, [www.mahaloArts.com/sayhey/](http://www.mahaloArts.com/sayhey/)

November 22, 2019, Friday, 4:00–6:00 pm

FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGIANS'

NETWORK ANNUAL MEETING

American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, San Diego, California

The Network will bring feminist theological insights to bear on the urgent impact of climate change around the world. What is the role of religion in these human-made problems, and how can feminist resources be put to best use for solutions? All are welcome.

Chairs: Mary E. Hunt, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

RSVP: [water@hers.com](mailto:water@hers.com)

December 8, 2019

SAVE THE DATE

This is the tentative date for the release and celebration of *Elder Wisdom: Searching for Truth in Circles of Women*, a collection of writings by Anita McLeod to be published by RCWMS.

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:

January 2–9, 2020 (Wednesday-Wednesday)

May 3–10, 2020 (Sunday-Sunday)

May 10–17, 2020 (Sunday-Sunday)

# Womanist

by Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae)

The Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care: A Safe Harbour on Stormy Seas

When I envisioned this space, my mind's eye saw gatherings full of Black women of all shapes, sizes, colors, backgrounds...a convergence of magical, beautiful, healing women with stories and intersections all finding and forming a way together. In full loyalty to my (chosen) Womanist upbringing and my social justice lens, the space is given permission to form itself organically in alignment with the voices that are present in the room.

Some women come wounded. Some come whole. Some come broken hearted. Some come joyful. Some women come in pieces. Some come successful. Some come seeking. Within the walls of this workshop / worship experience, Black women are encouraged and inspired to explore all of what has formed us for today and discover all of what will serve us or haunt us in our tomorrows. Our common goal is to embrace self-care by first embracing, accepting, seeing and unapologetically being ourselves.

Two things hold true for every gathering that is convened:

- 1) The participants in the room have chosen to be there.
- 2) Everyone in the room has a story.

These two truths are the guiding light for the time and space we share. These two truths help us to form a safe harbour for the many stories that are revealed in the room. These two truths make room for participation by choice and for taking care of ourselves as we see fit along the way. They give us the ability to hold and handle the goods, the bads and the uglies. They grant us permission to rejoin ourselves to the parts of ourselves that we need but have rejected...to remember and re-member who we are.

Audre Lorde so insightfully said, "If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive." This statement holds ancestral truth for Black women, both in the United States and diasporically. Historically, there have been stereotypes and identities assigned to Black women's bodies, both in Black community and in the larger world. Those stereotypes and identities are imposed upon us from birth and become an everyday part of the ways we see the world and the ways we navigate our way through it. They inform the ways we experience love, relationship, self-awareness, self-esteem, and self. The Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care serves as a (and for many Black women, the only) space where we are called out from the identities that have been requested and required of us and are instead encouraged to embrace and embody the words of Audre Lorde by defining ourselves for ourselves.

One of the tenets of Womanism is that womanists (Black women) are not separatists, except periodically, for reasons of health (see the definition of Womanism as defined in Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*). This is one such moment. There is endless data that shows how Black women's health has been consistently compromised because of slavery and colonization worldwide. In these spaces designed

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# Womanist...

intentionally and unapologetically for only the presence of Black women, we form community, find love, and fuel each other's strength. Armed with self-care as our daily companion, Black women are equipped with tools to build and live more holistically healthy lives in a world that does not prioritize our well-being. We are afforded a moment of respite to reclaim our humanity and be seen.

In the midst of a moment in time when anti-black rhetoric and sentiment is palpable and race relations, globally, are strained, I desire to minister to the essence of who I am and those I meet most often in the intersections of my life...Black women are from whom I come. My commitment to Black womanhood is personal and we've been taught that the personal is political. Audre Lorde gave us insight on how to think of the care Black women need when she said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Black women's self-care is a departure from the norm as are the ways that it is addressed in the context of these sacred spaces. Both the room and the bodies in it are sacred space and we gather to celebrate that God is here.

For more information on how to convene a gathering of The Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care contact Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae) at [poetrd@gmail.com](mailto:poetrd@gmail.com).

*Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae) is a Womanist, mother, wife, grandmother, preacher, poet, singer, musician, Social Justice activist, advocate, lecturer, and educator. She holds a dual BA in English and African and African American Studies with a certificate in Women's Studies, from Duke University, and an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary, in the City of New York, with a concentration in Theology and the Arts, Interreligious Studies and Interfaith Dialogue. She is an intentional lover of humanity and actively lives the self-care life about which she teaches and advocates. Her personal philosophy of interpersonal interaction is, "If I've not positively influenced someone everywhere I've gone, I've not walked in my purpose."*

# November

by Betty Wolfe

Chill gray clouds of muted morning  
Give way to yellow sun on its path to winter solstice.

Then:

Golden ginkgo,

Scarlet maple,

Undecided live oaks

Shout

To the breezy blue sky;

Drop leafy messages on the somnolent earth.

We crunch them underfoot

As, plantlike, our faces follow

The final warmth of autumn.

*Betty Wolfe is a Guild Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner® in Durham, NC.*

# Rise Up...

name I never knew, asked me if I'd done this on purpose. Certain professors had a very difficult time navigating the reality that a due date was ambiguous. No, I cannot predict the moment the baby will arrive, and am thus unsure whether I'll make the final exam.

Whenever possible, I hid in the Women's Center, a small windowless room rumored to be an old closet that I assume someone begrudgingly handed over once women were able to "prove" there was a need. It had a couch, lamps, and tea. I spent afternoons horizontal or moving through cat/cow poses on the rug, actively fighting to retain my intuition—my lived, embodied experience; to return to my breath and the two beating hearts inside my body. This space away from the glorification of memorization, headiness, and exegesis was my refuge.

In *Women Rise Up*, Katey Zeh illustrates that for biblical women, embodiment was not necessarily understood as an individual experience. Indeed, the stories that she highlights reflect women crying, birthing, dying, and bleeding. But none of them are outside of a more robust definition of embodiment as a collective process; a collective responsibility. Call it the Body of Christ (a notion mentioned but rarely put into practice), if you'd like, or collective liberation, or just plain community. We are connected.

Zeh points to the bond between Ruth and Naomi. As widows, the women must depend upon one another for survival. In the midst of grief and exhaustion, Ruth and Naomi do not lose sight of their responsibility to cultivate justice. As Zeh notes, they resist the patriarchy by banding together. Similarly, the stories of the Exodus midwives and mothers - Puah, Shiprah, and Moses' mother, reflect not only the deeply personal grief that mothers endured during that time, but also the acts of resistance that the women stepped into in order to save a generation of Hebrew boys. There is a simultaneous honoring of the lived experience of self and the experience of a people. We are again reminded that embodiment is a familial, collective, and transgenerational process.

And when I think about it, that's what the Women's Center was for me. It went beyond being a space safe for my body's changes and presence (and, eventually, a space for my baby). It was also a collective space, rooted in relationship and resistance. Women gathered there to claim space for their bodies, find their voices, and brainstorm ways to rise up.

*Christine Houghton is a grief therapist in Durham and serves on the RCWMS Board of Trustees.*



# Birthday

by Rebecca Welper

RCWMS just turned forty-two! Thank you to everyone who came to the office on August 18 for our birthday celebration. We had cookies, Locopops, sidewalk chalk, and bubbles. It was very sweet to celebrate this milestone and bid farewell to summer with the RCWMS family.

RCWMS never would have made it this far without you and your support. Thank you to everyone who donated this summer, helping us raise 118% of our summer fundraising goal. Your gifts make transformational moments, authentic connection, and spiritual healing possible.

We're especially grateful for our loyal monthly sustainers. It makes such a difference knowing your gifts are coming in every month. If you're like me and always mean to make a gift but keep forgetting, setting up automatic monthly payments makes it easy. Go to [www.rcwms.org/donate/](http://www.rcwms.org/donate/) and sign up to make recurring gifts in any amount. We so appreciate all the ways each of you shows up, lends support, and makes this community special.

## 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, Triangle Community Foundation, and Community Foundation of Western NC.

RCWMS Trustees: Tanya Best, Merle Boyd, Solita Denard, Jehanne Gheith, Cathy Hasty, Christine Houghton, Márcia Rego, Rebecca Vidra, Molly Williams, and Karen Ziegler

Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director  
Rebecca Welper, Development Director & Special Projects  
Marya McNeish, Programs & Publications  
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. Please, send a check to our office at: RCWMS, 1202 Watts Street, Durham, NC 27701, or go to [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org).

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