

# South of the Garden

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

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June 2020

## Summer

by Rebecca Welper

It's July of 1981. I'm six weeks old. I feel safe in my mother's arms, but she must be terrified as she clutches me tight and gingerly takes each step down the fifteen-foot dock ladder to the boat. Along with my three-year-old sister and dad, we make it safely to Cumberland Island, Georgia, for the first Render family reunion, and my first introduction to the water. From then on, summer to me has meant swimming.

Growing up in Ohio, we took only occasional trips to the beach, but there were yearly vacations at lakes, and we nearly lived at the pool. On cool mornings, my swimming instructor mother conditioned us to jump right into the cold water and get swimming. She patiently corrected my strokes and pushed me farther than I thought I could go. Most of all, she imparted to me the sheer joy of being in water.

Three years ago, I joined the JCC pool with my one-year-old. She immediately took to the water and we met some of our best friends in Durham. But this May, I found myself cancelling our membership. What was I going to do without those bright mornings at the pool, laughing with other moms, eating picnic lunches, watching my child delight in the water? I had been looking forward to teaching her to swim on her own.

As I write this, I know how privileged I am to be mourning the loss of the swimming pool for a summer. People are dying. Others are putting themselves in harm's way daily to care for the sick and vulnerable. People are losing their livelihoods. And poor me doesn't want to face a hot Durham summer with my small nuclear family in the comfort of our air-conditioned home.

Grief works in strange ways. It often feels easier to focus on my personal sense of loss, rather than grasp the full scope of the global tragedy surrounding all of us—and unjustly affecting some of us much more harshly than others. I need to continue balancing care for myself with finding ways to support others.

At RCWMS, we continue to help each other through the large and small losses—and bright spots—we're experiencing, albeit from a distance. This summer's virtual programs include mindfulness workshops, writing groups, and a class called, "How to Create a Virtual Council Circle." We miss being in the same room with you. While we wait for that day to come, we hope to see you on Zoom.

The summer after my mother died, I could barely swim laps because I was crying too much. It worked better to float on my back. Last week I finally ordered an inflatable pool for the backyard. It will be big enough for me to sit in and for my four-year-old to learn to float in. Like so many things, we'll do swimming differently this year. And we'll reach out and assist those experiencing deeper loss. We'll remind ourselves: this too, shall pass.



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## Balance

by Jeanette Stokes

I keep thinking that "stay-at-home" is like musical chairs. Wherever people were when the music stopped is where they remained. Plans were canceled and many of us simply stayed in our chairs. Others had no chair at all. No one realized how much of everyday life would change, that people would lose their jobs, let their hair grow, fear a trip to the grocery store, pause before greeting a neighbor on the sidewalk, or wake up in the night worrying that the inept administration in Washington might so botch the response that the pandemic would go on forever.

Since I don't enjoy being tense and tired, I've been looking for practices, activities, and classes to help me regain some sense of balance.

I know from experience that walking, writing, and making art help me in "normal" times, so I've been trying to do all three of those as often as I can. Walking is more challenging than usual, because there have been so many people walking on the sidewalks in my neighborhood. We are all learning to do the COVID do-si-do and not get too close. I'm editing a memoir that I've been working on for the last few years, and some days I actually have enough of a brain to pay attention to it. I've also been trying to do a little bit of art most days. At present, I'm making hardback blank books the way Bryant Holsenbeck taught me twenty years ago. I've collected lots of beautiful papers and enjoy picking out the ones to glue to the cover of the books. I also enjoyed stitching the spines. It feels as though I'm trying to mend the world as I stitch the pages together.

Some of RCWMS' offerings in April and May have helped me to restore some sense of balance. As an "Enneagram Six," my personality tends to be organized around being scared. When I get scared, I tense up and close my heart. In her Enneagram classes, Sandra Smith has reminded me that "Sixes" don't have to stay stuck in fear and dread. Just because that's my natural inclination, I have choices about how to respond to what is happening and choices about what to focus on.

In Jane Austin's class, "Coming Home to Yourself," I became aware that I have a central nervous system and that I'm responsible for taking care of it. There are things I can do to calm myself so that I don't feel overwhelmed all the time.

"Keeping Track," the writing workshop that Carol Henderson has been leading for RCWMS since the first of April, offers prompts that encourage me to reflect on and write about my experience of these unusual times.

I am lucky to work for an organization that provides me with practices and activities that help me to stay centered in times of crisis and will continue to do so in times of relative calm.

# Calendar

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

\*June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 2020, Mondays, 11:00 am–12:30 pm  
KEEP ON KEEPING TRACK: Writing Toward Balance in Challenging Times (Zoom)

In this online writing class, Carol will create a safe space and time to explore our fast-changing world and the rush of feelings constantly rising within us. Cost: \$90 (sliding scale). Zoom link will be sent.

Leader: Carol Henderson is a writer and workshop leader. See [carolhenderson.com](http://carolhenderson.com).

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

June 1-December 31, 9:00–5:00 pm EDT  
SOLO WANDERINGS!

Solo Wanderings (self-guided retreats for one or two from same household) provide a welcome respite. Art materials, detailed instructions, beverages and a snack provided for hands-on, creative journey.

Cost: Mon-Thurs: \$75–\$100 day only; Fri–Sat: \$150–175 (includes overnight). Best for ages 12 and up.

Safety: Thorough cleaning prior to your arrival with at least 72 hours between guests.

Leader: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer and artist who has led creative retreats for over 20 years.

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

\*June 4, 2020, Thursday, 1:00–3:30 pm EDT  
ENNEAGRAM: Wings and Resource Points (Zoom)

In times of uncertainty and stress, knowing how to use your type's wings and connecting points can be helpful. For those who know their Enneagram type.

Cost: \$45. Zoom link will be sent to participants.

Leader: Sandra Smith, MDiv, is a certified Enneagram teacher. Learn more about Sandra: [alchemyworks.com](http://alchemyworks.com)

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

\*June 8, 2020, Tuesday, 11:30 am–1:30 pm EDT (Zoom)

ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women  
Topic: Feminism—50 Years Ago and Today

Leaders: Lin Foster-Momsen

Contact: RCWMS, [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)

\*June 9–July 7, 2020, Tuesdays, 4:00–5:00 pm EDT  
or June 10–July 8, Wednesdays, 10:00–11:00 am EDT  
SITTING AT HOME CAN BE MORE ENJOYABLE  
with Awareness Through Movement® (Zoom)

Join Betty Wolfe for five Relaxercise™ lessons

designed for improving posture, flexibility, general comfort and liveliness. Lessons are taught sitting in a firm chair with feet well supported.

Cost: \$15 per class or \$60 for five classes

Leader: Betty Wolfe, MDiv, BCB, GCFPcm offers public Awareness Through Movement® classes and private lessons in Functional Integration®. Learn more about Betty here: [lessonswithease.com](http://lessonswithease.com).

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

\*June 11, 2020, 1:00–2:30 pm EDT

THE STILL PLACE: Mindful Journaling for Transformation (Zoom)

Discover your inner still place in this women's workshop that blends the depths of neuroscience findings with the power of narrative. You will learn mindful journaling practices to transform fear and cultivate a state of deep calm and connection. Experience how mindful journaling can help you to rewire your brain, reset your nervous system, and cultivate inner peace, happiness, and resilience. Please bring a journal and a pen.



Leader: Jen Johnson is a mindfulness teacher, coach & therapist. More: [jenjohnson.com/about-jen-johnson/](http://jenjohnson.com/about-jen-johnson/)  
Cost: \$25. Zoom link will be sent to participants.  
Register: [rcwms.org/events/](http://rcwms.org/events/)

June 13, 2020, Saturday, 10:00–2:00 pm EDT  
THE ART OF DISAPPEARING: A retreat inspired by the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye (Zoom)  
What can be found in long pauses, unknowns, and in between? Mandy will lead reflective, creative writing to evoke and uncover your answers. Claudia will take you on a mini trip, noticing what appears out of nowhere while engaged in simple art prompts.  
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer and artist who has led creative retreats for over 20 years. Mandy Mizelle Norris is a minister and chaplain.  
Cost: \$25–\$50. More: [artwanders.com/retreats/](http://artwanders.com/retreats/)  
Contact: [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com) or 919-306-2919

\*June 28, 2020, Sunday, 1:30–3:30 pm  
CREATING YOUR OWN COUNCIL CIRCLE (Zoom)  
An intergenerational workshop designed to help you create your own safe and nourishing council circle of support. An opportunity to experience virtual council circle and dive into ways to engage the relational aspects of the sacred feminine within the framework of virtual platforms.  
Leader: Sherylyn Pitt  
Cost: \$35. Zoom link will be sent to participants.  
Register: [rcwms.org/events/](http://rcwms.org/events/) Zoom link will be sent.

July 11, 2020, Saturday, 5:00–7:00 pm EDT (Tentative)  
FROM MEMORY: Exhibition of New Works by Sue Sneddon

Craven Allen Gallery, 1106 1/2 Broad St., Durham, NC  
Sneddon, a full-time painter since 1984, has taught more than a dozen classes via RCWMS, and is our current artist in residence. Much of her work has concentrated on the ocean, especially the NC coast. Free and open to the public.

Contact: Gallery, 919-286-4837, [cravenallengallery.com](http://cravenallengallery.com)

\*July 19, 2020, 1:00–4:00 pm  
FLASH OF SILVER with Laurel Ferejohn (Zoom)  
Flash: it's crystalline and compelling. Many literary journals look for it, many writers want to know what it is and how to write it. In this workshop for beginning to seasoned writers of memoir or fiction, you'll learn about the form that stands proud in its brevity and that can boost all your other writing. Enjoy creating to prompts, with readings and discussion.  
Cost: \$25. Zoom link will be sent to participants.  
Leader: Laurel Ferejohn is a writer & editor.  
Register: [rcwms.org/events/](http://rcwms.org/events/)

September 8–12, 2020  
FINDING YOUR MEDIUM: Painting with Sue Sneddon  
Pocosin Arts Gallery, 201 Main St, Columbia, NC  
Leader: Sue Sneddon, a much-loved NC artist  
Cost: \$545. Info: [pocosinarts.org/2020-workshops/](http://pocosinarts.org/2020-workshops/)

\*October 15–16, 2020, Thursday-Friday  
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival  
Probably via Zoom  
Info: [www.ncwomenpreaching.com](http://www.ncwomenpreaching.com)

Future Weeks of Quiet & Writing:  
September 20–27, 2020 (Sunday–Sunday)  
January 2–9, 2021 (Saturday–Saturday)  
May 9–16, 2021 (Sunday–Sunday)

# Sewing

by Rachel Sauls

I have never considered myself an artist. My painting skills peaked in the first grade, when I watercolored a portrait of Chrysanthemum, the title character of one of my favorite children's books. Chrysanthemum is a petite mouse with teensy ballet shoes, a tutu made of petals, and a long name. The painting I created in my elementary school hallway seemed to capture her delicate frame, and I was quite pleased with my six-year-old self.

Ever since we began strictly social distancing in Durham, NC in mid-March, I have craved engagement in creative projects despite my lack of artistic abilities. Sewing seemed like a pertinent skill to take up in a time in which care for others can take the form of mask-making. A local relative kindly lent me her sewing machine, and I spent my first three hours with the bulky contraption staring at the gray manual, winding the bobbin, and threading the upper and lower threads. Prior to that exhausting Saturday morning, I had no idea what a bobbin was, much less that it needed to be wound. When the sewing machine and I were decently acquainted with one another, I pulled out my scrap fabric and ran it through. Huge loops appeared on the underside of the fabric, and it wasn't until a desperate consultation with my friends through social media that I learned the importance of the presser foot.

My mask-making endeavors could be going much better than they are. Yesterday, I made what seemed to be a beautiful mask only to realize after closing it up that I had not properly sewn in one of the ties. I left my workspace feeling defeated by fabric and thread and needles, opting to spend the remainder of my evening attempting *The New York Times* crossword instead.

Since beginning the RCWMS Anita McLeod Internship in January, I have had the opportunity to meet talented artists who work in a variety of mediums. I admire their thought-provoking creations while othering myself as someone outside of that blossoming world of imagination. Over the past few weeks, RCWMS Executive Director Jeanette Stokes has undertaken the time-consuming work of assembling the prettiest books. Environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck breathes life into scraps through her "Angels and Animals" workshops. The artwork Jeanette and Bryant create infuses joy in their communities while fulfilling their own desires to create. I want to be more like them than I am.

I am still sewing, despite the fact that I have botched more masks than I have created. I am starting to think that perhaps creativity is an invitation into failure. The more creative I strive to be, the more I find my table covered in unevenly cut fabric and snipped segments of thread. I place the ties in between the wrong layers of the mask. My upper thread tension is too tight. When these errors occur, I simply take a deep breath, take a break, and start over. Creative endeavors have transformed into lessons in accepting mistakes and persisting.

When I started sewing, I worked under the assumption that the delight of creation would be the finished product. The finished product is indeed delightful. When I manage to sew a mask that can actually be worn without falling apart, I experience an undeniably pleasant sense of accomplishment and relief. The more I sew, though, the more I realize that the delight

(Continued on this page.)



Illustration by Alison Benincase

# Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. In addition to our writing classes, workshops, and retreats, we run an essay contest in most years. Our 2020 Essay Contest opens for submissions on June 15 and is open through July 31, 2020. Women 18 years of age and older may submit previously unpublished nonfiction essays of 1,200 words or less.

**THEME:** Essays should focus on the theme "What has changed for you during the COVID-19 pandemic." We invite submissions that consider this theme in creative ways. What has changed? What have you lost or abandoned? Is there anything that used to bother you that doesn't anymore? Have there been any benefits? What has sustained you during this time?

**DETAILS:** Women 18 years of age or older may submit up to 2 nonfiction essays, 1,200 words or less. Submit online only: [rcwms.submittable.com/submit](https://rcwms.submittable.com/submit). Previous first-place winners and current RCWMS Board members not eligible. No sermons, please. Do not put your name on your essay(s). Fill out the online cover letter form with the essay's title, your name, address, phone, and email. Submissions open June 15, 2020 and close July 31, 2020.

**PRIZES:** \$300 for first place, \$200 second, and \$100 third. The winning essay will be published in the RCWMS newsletter, *South of the Garden*, in September or December 2020.

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

# Sewing...

of creation is woven into the process rather than the result. The delight comes from knowing that I am undertaking a project that I am likely to fail at, given my current ratio of attempted and completed masks. I am trying to lean into the absurdity of continuing my new artistic practice rather than rejecting it, so that I might find the beauty in the absurdity of the pandemic.

I still do not consider myself an artist, but I have decided to stop drawing imaginary lines that separate me from brilliant creators like Jeanette and Bryant. In a time of social distancing, there is no need for me to manufacture unnecessary distance between myself and artists I admire. During my afternoons of sewing, I think of Jeanette's books and Bryant's animals and my watercolor painting of Chrysanthemum. Six-year-old me might be disappointed in the devolution of my artistic skills, but I think she would giggle at the pep talks I give myself before pushing down the foot pedal and running my fabric through the sewing machine. I think her eyes would widen with awe at the speed of the needle and the magic of turning three rectangular fabric cutouts and two elastic strips into a single item. Inevitably, she would see me botch the mask and start over. Maybe the silliness of watching me try again would be her favorite part. What might you fail at today? Perhaps the delight of absurdity is waiting there for you.

*Rachel Sauls is Rachel Sauls is the current RCWMS Anita McLeod Intern. She graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in May 2020 with her B.A. in English and Comparative Literature and she will soon begin her M.Div. at Yale Divinity School. Rachel enjoys spending time with animals, running, and laughing with her friends over Zoom.*

# Then & Now

by Marcy Litle

This morning, I have been listening to the rain. I love listening to rain. I loved it before and I love it now. That hasn't changed.

My bed is my office. This is a bad habit. One I had before and one that I have now. That hasn't changed. Though I spend more time in my "office" now than I did before.

Sometimes, feelings get stuck in my body, and when I meditate I am able to notice the tension and maybe release a little of it, and sometimes I can give it a name. Oh, that's fear, that's anger, that's sadness. This was true before and it is true now, but now the feelings seem to be bigger and more relentless even as the outer contours of my life have become smaller.

Before, I flew back and forth between North Carolina and Seattle every few weeks. In Seattle, I spent a lot of time with my family and tried to keep up with my friends by phone, email, and text. Now that I am stuck in North Carolina, I still keep up with my friends by phone, email, and text, even though they live nearby, with a lot more FaceTime and something brand new, Zoom. I only see my granddaughters on screens and can't share hugs with them, but we communicate a lot by FaceTime, email, and texts. I love to see their faces, but wish we could cuddle and hug.

I watch the birds at the feeder outside my back window. Before and now. That hasn't changed. I am jealous because Jim's feeder in the living room seems to get all the cute little birds. That hasn't changed.

I follow the news even more closely than before, harboring a useless hope that someone somewhere holds the key. Hoping, and then despairing, that we will emerge from this in a better place. Sometimes I remember that music is more helpful than news. Big bites of music, small bites of news. Sometimes, but not often enough.

I walk most days, meditate most days, do yoga, read, write a little, cook. All these I did before, but now I do them more.

*Marcy Litle taught international studies at Duke for 25 years. In retirement she writes, paints, and edits. Her first book, Illusions of Innocence, reflections on what it means to "think you are white" in America today, will be released by RCWMS in the fall.*



ArtMari/Shutterstock.com

# Stay in Touch

There are many ways to stay in touch with the resources and activities provided by RCWMS.

- Subscribe to our email calendar and event announcements.
- Subscribe to this print newsletter. A one-year subscription costs \$20.
- Visit [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org), for more information about our programs, the history of RCWMS, books and DVDs to purchase. The website's CALENDAR is up to date with events and registration information.
- Visit our BLOG, [www.rcwms.org/blog](http://www.rcwms.org/blog), where you will find news, reviews, and summaries of our various activities.
- Be in touch and let us know about programs that you would like for us to sponsor.
- We have been learning how to provide resources, programs, and connections in the strange new world of COVID-19. We encourage you to share our emails and our web address [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org) with your friends, colleagues, and relatives.



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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Staff: Jeanette Stokes, Executive Director; Rebecca Welper, Development Director & Special Projects; Marya McNeish, Programs & Publications; Sue Sneddon, Artist in Residence; and Rachel Sauls, Intern



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).

YOUR MAILING LABEL shows the year and month your subscription will expire. 2109 = 2021 September.

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