

# South of the Garden

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

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December 2020

## Winter

by Rebecca Welper

Recently, in a local parents' Facebook group (one of the few places I get to be social these days), folks were sharing ideas about celebrating the Winter Solstice with their families. I've marked the Solstice sporadically over the years, often intimidated by adapting traditions that I wasn't raised with. In the Facebook discussion, I appreciated the down-to-earth suggestions, including candles, altars, lanterns, decorating a Yule tree, making a bonfire. One parent shared their family practice of writing down on pieces of paper things they want to change or bad things that happened that year. Then they throw them into the fire. She said she expected a lot of pieces of paper for 2020.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around this year coming to an end. When I'm in the right frame of mind, I see opportunities for creating new traditions and focusing on simple pleasures. But often I find myself feeling wistful, knowing we won't get to see family and snow up north, and missing holiday shopping at places like Morgan Imports in downtown Durham. Last year our family Christmas card featured our then 3-year-old sitting on their Buck the Reindeer amidst the festive display of model trains, Advent calendars, and glittering ornaments. I'm sad Morgan Imports shut their doors during the pandemic and that it won't be one of the places waiting for us post-quarantine.

It's all well and good to mourn the closing of a beloved neighborhood store. But it can be hard to come to grips with the much deeper losses we've experienced as individuals, communities, and a nation this year. Of all times to hold onto light and hope in the midst darkness, now is the time. This fall's election continued to show deep division among us, and a dire need for reckoning, but it also brought us hope. It only took 100 years (give or take, depending on one's race and citizenship status), but finally, women have elected one of our own to the second highest office in the land. Led by the votes of Indigenous women and Black women, Kamala Harris will be the first female, Black, and Asian American Vice President. That is something to celebrate.

Whether you're slogging through these colder months with minimal or an abundance of holiday cheer, or engaging in a little bit of hibernation, we hope you'll continue to join us virtually at RCWMS. Rachael Wooten is leading a Tara Practice workshop series, and her Tara Cards would make wonderful Solstice gifts. Marcy Litle will be reading from her new book, *Illusions of Innocence*, just published by RCWMS Press (another gift idea). Betty Wolfe is leading an awareness through movement class called *Two Lessons in Solstice Time, 2020*, promising rest and replenishment for your nervous system. The Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care series continues in December and into the new year. Thank you for being part of this community and sharing your light.



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## I Will Survive

by Tsharre Sanders

*Note: This essay won second place in the 2020 RCWMS Essay Contest.*

"At first I was afraid; I was petrified," Gloria Gaynor declares at the beginning of her 1978 hit song. A song that starts with fear and ends with declaration of triumph. A song that begins with apprehension and concludes with confidence. "I Will Survive" is the best song to explain this season of unrest in my life due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing racism in the United States, and the recent public response to police brutality.

As a Black woman who lives life with anxious thinking and prolonged periods of a depressive mood, I was terrified of the threat of a national pandemic. I knew when my students left campus I would have no reason to be motivated. I was certain I would lay around in the bed, get up a few minutes before teaching on Zoom, and engage students with virtual programming from the confines of the cage my home would certainly become. My worst fear came true and things were panning out exactly how I set them up on the set of my mind. I spent time in bed, away from folks I cared about, unmotivated, and confused. I didn't understand the timing of this outbreak. I spent a month thinking how this disease did me wrong, but one day something clicked, and I decided it was time to move on.

I developed a routine and I was in the swing of things from teaching remotely, to hosting programs for my students online, and to finding innovative ways to connect with people I love. I learned how to get along with what was becoming my new normal right when I was developing a healthy routine before the outbreak happened. All of a sudden, trouble was back just like for the protagonist in Gloria's story. The trouble this time was the unjust killings of Black Americans without justice being served on their behalves. By this time, I was questioning the Divine.

I should have known for certain that fear and negative feelings would be back to bother me. As a Black person, in addition to seeing Black people being murdered and no justice being served, I also was inundated with opinions from every angle about how people should react to these unjust killings of Black people. There were people at work, from school, and in my personal life who all had varying opinions and it became overwhelming. As a Black woman, I was questioning why most of the narratives around the outrage were centered around cisgender, heterosexual Black men. I was devastated by the fact Breonna Taylor, a Black woman who was killed in her sleep, did not have as much outrage for the public to see. I continue to be upset that her murderers have not been apprehended. As a queer Black woman, I was so disappointed that Tony McDade had not received

(Continued on back.)

# Calendar

\* = RCWMS events. More info: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events).

Ongoing, Tuesdays, 7:00 pm–8:00 pm  
MUSIC with ALISON WEINER: takeOut jazz with mahaloJazz!

If you've been to The Eddy Pub in Saxapahaw on Tuesdays, before the virus changed our lives, you know we considered it to be the beginning of the weekend. Through the magic of video streaming, we continue the sentiment with jazz ambiance every Tuesday evening, encouraging take-out meals and beverages from the pub or your chosen dining establishment. Info: [www.mahaloArts.com](http://www.mahaloArts.com). Free. Tip jar: [paypal.me/aliMahalo](https://www.paypal.me/aliMahalo). Attend: [www.facebook.com/mahaloArts/videos](https://www.facebook.com/mahaloArts/videos)

Ongoing, day or overnight

SOLO WANDERINGS! Creative Retreats

The Stable, private retreat in Durham, NC

For those needing a creative outlet or space for solace, peace & quiet, Solo Wanderings (self-guided retreats for you or 1 to 3 others in your safe pod) provide a welcome respite. Choose from 8 Solo Wanderings: Peace Poles, Inner Peace Poles, Labyrinths, Forest Bathing & Earth Art, Poetry & Art Journals, Vision Board Journals, Multi-Media-Mix, or Art & Self-Nurturing. Abundant materials, detailed instructions, beverages and snack will be ready as you embark on your creative journey. Safety precautions observed. Best for ages 12 and up.

Leader: Claudia Fulshaw is a graphic designer, artist, and long-time wanderer who has been leading creative retreats for over 20 years.

Cost: \$100 solo/\$65 additional; overnight additional  
Contact: [artwanders.com](http://artwanders.com), [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com)

December 4, 2020, 7:00 pm

SUE SNEDDON: A Live Facebook Event

Pocosin Arts, Columbia, NC (via Facebook)

Sue has had an exhibition up in this beautiful space on the Scuppernong River since November 2019.

What a year! We've decided to share this work with others. Alison Weiner will play music while Sue puts finishing touches on a painting. Georgann Eubanks will read from her book, *The Month of Their Ripening*. There may be other surprises! On Dec. 5, Alison's morning song (piano & voice) will be broadcast on Facebook from Pocosin.

More about Pocosin Arts: [pocosinarts.org](http://pocosinarts.org)

Attend: [www.facebook.com/mahaloArts](https://www.facebook.com/mahaloArts)

\*December 8 & 15, Tuesdays, 6:00–7:00 pm

or December 9 & 16, Wednesdays 10:00–11:00 am

TWO LESSONS IN SOLSTICE TIME, 2020: Awareness Through Movement®

This two-lesson Solstice series, taught in a seated position, will assist rest and replenishment for your nervous system—if you still have one after events of the past 11 months! (via Zoom)

Fee: \$15/lesson or FREE with a donation to [rcwms.org](http://rcwms.org)  
Register: [bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com](mailto:bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com) or phone 919-794-4139. Payment instructions and Zoom link provided after that.

\*December 13, 2020, Sunday, 3:00 pm (via Zoom)

READING: *Illusions of Innocence* by Marcy Litle

Join RCWMS to celebrate the publication of Marcy Litle's new book. "Courageous, inspiring, and deeply honest, *Illusions of Innocence* explores the roots of racism both in family stories and national myths. Striking the perfect balance between memoir and history, Litle's book engages with contemporary Black voices and invites white Americans to do the prickly but urgent work of re-examining white innocence."

—Márcia Rego

Free and open to the public.

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



\*December 15, 2020, 7:30–8:30 pm (via Zoom)

THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE:  
A Series with Kim Gaubault

Self-care is too often an intervention after a crisis rather than a preventative measure. If we allow our bodies, minds, and spirits to break down in the course of doing our work, we not only put ourselves at risk, we risk the integrity of our work. This series will offer practical tools for everyday self-care to Black women-identified individuals doing all forms of ministry, in church and community. Series will continue in 2021 on the third Tuesday of each month (Jan. 19, Feb. 16.)

Dec.: *Ethics of Community Care: I Am My Sister's Keeper*  
Leader: Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae) is an intentional lover of humanity and actively lives the self-care life about which she teaches and advocates.

Cost: \$10, \$25, or \$40 per session. Sign up for each one individually. Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

December 17, 2020, Thursday, 7:00 pm

TARA PRACTICE: Practicing the Sadhanas of the Twenty-one Taras with Rachael Wooten.

Drawing from her new book, *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*, Wooten will offer teachings about Tara and lead a guided meditation. Sessions will occur monthly on the third Thursday.

Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, and Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher.

More about Rachael: [rachaelwootenauthor.com](http://rachaelwootenauthor.com).

Cost: Free

More: [www.bhumisparsha.org/events/](http://www.bhumisparsha.org/events/)

January 9–30, Saturdays, 10:00 am–3:00 pm

WHITE PEOPLE WORKING FOR RACIAL JUSTICE (via Zoom)

At this time in our nation, we are witnessing an alarming resurgence of white supremacy and state-sanctioned violence. It is imperative that white people do the deep work required to claim and embody an anti-racist identity, understand the privilege they carry, and interrupt racism where they live. In this 4-week intensive, white people can learn together, ask questions, make mistakes, work through defensiveness and guilt, and examine fears, without burdening People of Color. Participants will come to understand movements for racial justice in the US, learn more about white privilege and unearned advantage, develop skills to claim and shape an anti-racist identity, practice the skills of interrupting racism, and develop networks of support and accountability. The series will include discussions, readings, videos, journaling, and homework.

Leaders: Autumn Campbell & Lois McCullen Parr

Sponsor: Justice Leaders Collaborative

Cost: \$395, scholarships available

Info: [www.justiceleaderscollaborative.com/](http://www.justiceleaderscollaborative.com/)

\*Jan. 13, 27, & Feb. 3, 2021, Wednesdays, 1:00–3:00 pm

ANGELS AND ANIMALS: Creatures of All Kinds with Bryant Holsenbeck (via Zoom)

Back by popular demand! This three session workshop is about making art out of the stuff of our everyday lives. Nothing bought, nothing ordered—only what you can find! Teacher Bryant Holsenbeck is "curious about what we will find and then what we will be inspired to make. The techniques I have to teach are simple. Twisting, tying, wrapping, and more!"

Leader: Environmental and textile artist Bryant Holsenbeck has been creating beautiful art out of stuff for decades. Learn more about Bryant at [bryantholsenbeck.com](http://bryantholsenbeck.com) or follow her on Instagram at @Bryant-Holsenbeck.

Cost: \$75 (includes all three sessions)

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

\*Tentative Weeks of Quiet & Writing 2021:

May 9–16, September 19–26

# Safety

by Rachel Sauls

On Saturday, November 7, I watched with delight as people all over the world sang and danced in the streets. A narrow street in New York City came alive to ABBA's "Dancing Queen," with voices harmonizing in the street and others belting from balconies. Californians sang an impassioned rendition of "Since U Been Gone" at a gas station in Los Feliz. The president-elect recited the hymn "On Eagle's Wings." John Legend shared a cover of Ray Charles' "Georgia On My Mind." Across cities, states, and countries, people danced in joyous celebrations to the spontaneous and yet long-awaited music of the day—sighs of relief, tambourines, cries of exhaustion, trumpets, impulsive yells, the honk of car horns.

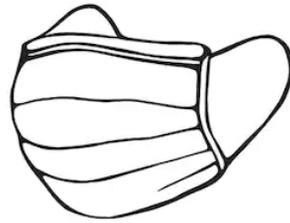
I was relieved to see that the vast majority of the people celebrating were doing so in a way that would have looked so strange to me a year ago—wearing masks. Simple blue surgical masks, N95s, rainbow cloth masks. As someone at high risk for COVID-19 complications, I am trying to be cautious and intentional about my interactions with others. I don't love the current level of attention I am giving to respiratory droplets, but right now I believe this careful attention is the most compassionate way for us to go about our day-to-day lives.

Thankfully, as we learn more about COVID-19 and modes of transmission, we are also learning more about how to protect ourselves and others. According to the CDC, "In general, the more closely you interact with others and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread." Thirty minutes spent in a well-ventilated grocery store in which customers and employees are wearing masks and social distancing is generally safer than having a maskless dinner with a friend, even though the latter interaction may seem less risky and admittedly more appealing. We are living in a time of mismatch, in which being in close contact and cozy spaces with people we love poses some of the most dangerous circumstances in terms of COVID-19 transmission risk.

We also find evidence of mismatch in statistics describing who in the United States is contracting COVID-19 and experiencing the most severe cases. Racism has resulted in higher rates of COVID-19 and poorer medical outcomes in BIPOC communities. Artist and 2013 MacArthur Foundation Fellow Carrie Ann Weems has created public artwork to emphasize demographic disparities and the importance of following public health recommendations. Her current project, RESIST COVID TAKE 6!, points out that because COVID is such a great threat to communities of color, we all need to mask up, back up, and wash up. Six feet of social distancing saves lives.

I deeply admire the activists, voters, and neighbors who are finding new and creative ways to celebrate in the midst of mismatch. They are singing with masks on and dancing from a distance, prioritizing safety and joy and refusing to create a false dichotomy between the two. We live in a time of danger and hope. We know what it takes to keep one another safe—let's keep doing it, so that we can all be here to celebrate what comes next.

*Rachel Sauls is a 2020 graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill and is an Anita McLeod Intern at RCWMS.*



# Stitching

by Jeanette Stokes

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit North Carolina in March 2020, I began darning socks. With interrupted supply chains around the world, I wondered whether we would be able to buy simple things like socks. But the impulse to start stitching was also a desire to repair the social fabric being torn apart by the pandemic.

In November this year, I led a memorial service for my dear friend Mary Edith Bentley Abu-Saba. We became friends in the 1980s when we both lived in Greensboro. She was a counseling psychologist at the University of North Carolina Greensboro where I was a part-time Presbyterian campus minister. Both feminists with progressive politics, it didn't take us long to find one another.

It was a somewhat improbable friendship. She was twelve years older, half a foot taller, and somewhat louder than I was. Growing up in Virginia, the youngest child of a Methodist minister and a school teacher, money was tight. The over-privileged only child of a doctor and a housewife in Oklahoma, I never knew want. But we were crazy about one another.

We were both the products of women's colleges. Before graduating from Randolph Macon Woman's College, however, Mary Edith was arrested for sitting-in at a local lunch counter and was in jail for 21 days. I graduated from Smith College, having been a marginal participant in the antiwar movement. But in Greensboro, we were comrades in the trenches of social change.

Over the decade we worked together closely, Mary and I started a women's center at UNCG, bought a building where she could have her therapy practice and I could house RCWMS, and mounted a campaign for the NC House of Representatives. (She was the candidate and I was the campaign manager.)

I spent hours at her dinner table eating hummus and tabouli and learning about the Middle East from Elias, Mary's dear husband. Elias was born in a village outside Sidon, Lebanon, a city old enough to have been conquered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans. For Elias, any discussion of history began about 4,000 years ago, a whole new perspective for one born in a country that was barely 200 years old.

Mary Edith and Elias were warm and welcoming. Parties at their home guaranteed diverse guests, great food, lots of storytelling, and laughter. When the Lebanese Civil War left three of Elias' siblings and their families homeless, the Abu-Sabas welcomed them to Greensboro, helping them with housing, schooling, and jobs.

What was obvious at Mary Edith's memorial service was how grateful people are for the love and support they received from her and from Elias. Friends and relatives in NC, California, Canada, England, Lebanon and Qatar described the love and support they received from Mary Edith and Elias. Many of us said we would not be the people we are today had we not known them.

The gathering gave me hope for the future. Americans and Lebanese, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, we were brought together by a smart, kind, generous, outspoken woman who spent her whole life stitching together communities for friends and relatives and working for justice for the forgotten and over-looked.

# Survive...

as much coverage in the media and that less people seemed to be saying his name. I am saddened that his killers are seen as victims in the state of Florida.

I wondered how God could let humanity get so evil. Why was someone, a young 19-year old girl, Oluwatoyin Salau, who was very vocal in her fight for justice, missing for days and then found dead? I was upset that people could not see what I believed to be larger than politics or race; this, to me, was spiritual and these battles were above any human condition, but no one was willing to look. I remained sad and confused. I started to question my purpose in life and why I would be so happy doing something for such a small sect of people, and then realized that my working on the behalf and advocating for those who are more prone to violence is beneficial to the fight for justice.

After this revelation, I had to let fear and loneliness know they were not welcome in my life anymore, at least for the time being. I no longer wanted to be sad and isolated because I was reminded that as a Black queer woman my life mattered even when I'm not seeing that in society at-large. When I felt it safe enough inside myself, I was able to socialize with my people safely and feel like I was back in community. I felt like the Divine was back. I felt like God had no longer abandoned me. My friends would walk with me as I gained my strength. My friends would teach me new skills, like how to ride a bicycle. They would shower me in their love during our physically distant picnics. I went from questions of evil, which I still have, to experiencing the goodness of life. I went from hopeless to hopeful. I was able to see that even though there are some villains in life, there will always be a hero. I was able to consider the duality of life. I was able to see that as long as I know how to love, I will be able to stay alive. I was reminded that love is good, Love is God, and I find God in my people. I have been continuously amazed by the newness that has been able to come from all of this turmoil. Just like Gloria's breakup, this time of unrest in my life has taught me that I will survive.

*I am Tsharre Sanders, a Black, queer woman of faith and I live life with a depressive condition. I enjoy writing and I enjoy working to make rural, conservative Christianity a spiritually safer place for Black, queer, Christian youth.*



# Queer Clergy

RCWMS is excited to launch a new 2021 program, "Queer Clergywomen Thriving in the South." This six-month program will offer queer religious leaders opportunities to find, support, and advocate for each other. The purpose of Queer Clergywomen Thriving in the South is to connect religious leaders with their interior resources and with each other, so that they might thrive in their ministry contexts, illuminating and enriching their communities and the world around them.

**The Need:** Many clergywomen, LGBTQ religious leaders in particular, feel isolated and unsure where to turn for community. Given the varying levels of acceptance and support within their religious traditions, queer clergywomen too often become discouraged and find themselves suffering burnout.

**The Vision:** We hope to provide a space where queer clergywomen come together, with the support of a skilled facilitator, to create healthy collegial relationships and explore practices and resources in their local communities that can sustain participants long after the program is over.

**The Plan:** A peer-supported cohort, led by an experienced facilitator, will meet for a 2-hour video chat once a month for six months. Cohort participants (clergywomen who've been religious leaders for 10 years or fewer) will receive a stipend, resources, structured conversation, and more!

Applications for the cohort will open in mid-December at [www.rcwms.org](http://www.rcwms.org). We welcome queer clergywomen, cis and trans, from all religious traditions to apply.



RCWMS is a forty-three-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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