

South of the Garden

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

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Summer

by Rebecca Welper

My five-year-old gasps with delight and she tugs me toward our front door. "Look!"

"What is it?" I ask.

"Come see!" So I follow her outside, and she ushers me to a new blossom in the garden. "Look, it bloomed! And there's another one!" She is stunned by the audacity of these sumptuous roses and lilies, appearing in the middle of the night where nothing was before. Who needs to leave the front yard, when there's so much summery wonder right at our doorstep?

In May, when I first sang in person with the Common Woman Chorus in over a year, I felt tears streaming down my cheeks into my mask. Away from the intense focus of mothering, I could feel what was present for me: grief at losing two grandmothers and an aunt this year; exhaustion from parenting without childcare; sensory overload from being around so many people; anxiety about how we'll all resume some normalcy this summer and beyond.

During the warm-ups, I wondered if I should have come. I had stumbled over my answers to the bright-eyed *how are you*s on the way in. Then I couldn't make the notes come out of my mouth. I felt strange and exposed rehearsing outside in the bright sun, scattered six feet apart and facing our director instead of enveloped in the comfortable choral semi-circle. By the second half of rehearsal, I got in the groove. We sang Sarah Bareilles' "Armor," a powerful piece about becoming stronger as women because of the shit we have to put up with from abusive and entitled men. We'd performed this song a year and a half ago, so the rhythms and harmonies were coming back to me. I heard my voice blend with those of the women around me, and I felt soothed. I wasn't ready to talk about everything that was weighing on me, but I'd taken a step outside my COVID comfort zone to be in the presence of others and create something beautiful—and that was enough for today.

By the end of the month, I was ready to venture out a little more for what I consider the beginning of summer: my birthday, May 26. This year I celebrated turning forty with a small bonfire with friends and outings to local restaurants with my family. Any other year, this might have felt like a subdued fortieth, but in a season of growth beyond our pandemic confines, it felt nothing short of magical.

At RCWMS, we're talking about how and when to resume in-person gatherings. This summer we'll still be offering Zoom workshops, including a new four-part writing series, *Risking Words*, led by Peggy Millin, and another Enneagram workshop with Sandra Smith, *Enneagram Types in Relationships*. We wish you peace and gentleness as things continue opening up this summer. May you find wonder in nature's blooms and in your creativity near and far from home.



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

Seventy

by Jeanette Stokes

At forty I was grumpy about my clothes. At fifty I was recently divorced and threw myself a rock 'n' roll party in a gymnasium with a live band. At sixty I was just so happy to be that old and to be in good health. At seventy I think I'm freaked out about being so much closer to the end than to the beginning of this journey we call life.

My birthday is May 26. I love having a birthday in May, because it is such a beautiful month. Peonies bloom in my backyard, the weather warms, and it is often nice enough to sit out on the front porch. As my seventieth birthday approached this year, I wondered how I might celebrate. Planning a large gathering didn't seem feasible, because of the COVID pandemic. So I started saying the two things I wanted for my birthday were to go to the beach and to walk in Duke Gardens, which had been closed for over a year.

Then the pandemic began to ease and I arranged for two weeks at the beach. I usually spend at least four weeks at the North Carolina coast each year, managing RCWMS art and writing retreats. The last time I was there was February 2020, just before the pandemic broke out. Many of my friends were able to visit the coast during COVID, and the vacation rental business did well. People of means figured they could rent a place, take food, disinfect when they arrived, and have a relatively safe vacation. But my time at the coast has been dependent on in-person events with unrelated people, and we canceled all of the in-person RCWMS events beginning in March last year. We put a lot of events online but a virtual trip to the beach didn't make any sense.

I was sad each time we canceled another beach retreat: May and September 2020, January and February 2021. In February this year vaccinations became more widely available in North Carolina, and my friends and colleagues started to get vaccinated. I began to hope that we might be able to gather safely in person in May for our regularly scheduled week of quiet and writing.

When I mentioned the possibility to a few regular attendees, they jumped at the chance. Some of them mentioned it to other friends, and before I knew it I had too many people. The house has nine rooms. We usually have a group of nine total, but Trinity Center and I thought four to six would be enough under the circumstances.

Since there were too many people interested in the week, I asked Trinity Center about a second week. Because of the pandemic, they had some availability in Pelican House, the retreat house we like to use. I wasn't sure if I could stand being away from home for two weeks. After months of enclosure, I had gotten used to being there, but I thought it was worth the risk. I agreed to two weeks. I started taking firm reservations for six women each week and then created a waiting

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

* = RCWMS events. More info: rcwms.org/events.

*June 3, 2021, Thursday, 6:30–7:30 pm EDT
PAULI MURRAY BOOKCLUB

Join the discussion of *Ferguson & Faith*, by Leah Gunning Francis. The conversation will be facilitated by Aleta Payne and Barbara Lau.
Register: bit.ly/PMCJUNBOOK. It's free.

*June 4, 11, 18, & 25, 2021, Fridays, 10:00–11:30 am EDT
RISKING WORDS: A 4-Week Writing Workshop with Peggy Millin (via Zoom)

In *Risking Words*, you will learn and use Centered Writing Practice, a body-centered freewriting technique employing neutral prompts. This distinctly feminine approach to the creative process opens the way for you to release your conception of what writing “should” be in order to allow the body’s wisdom to guide your pen. In the safety of our writing circle, you will be invited to share your writing and receive gentle responses from Peggy and/or group members. At the end of 4 weeks, you will have a notebook of your in-class writing and a technique for the continued support of your writing journey.

Leader: For more than 25 years, Peggy Tabor Millin has offered programs in the written word to facilitate women in telling their truths so they can stand in their power and create positive change in their world. Peggy is author of *Mary's Way and Women, Writing, and Soul*.
Cost: \$85, includes all four sessions
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*June 9, 2021, Wednesday, 10:00 am–12:30 pm EDT
GIFTS & CHALLENGES OF THE ENNEAGRAM TYPES IN RELATIONSHIPS—with Sandra Smith (Zoom)

All of us experience healthy relationships in our lives. How are we engaging and what, exactly, are we doing to support relationships working well? In other relationships, we find ourselves repeating patterns that limit our full relational potential. Together we’ll explore each type’s relational gifts that support healthy relating and patterns that derail relationships. Self-reflection and type groups will support our learning process.
Leader: Sandra Smith, MDiv, is a certified Enneagram teacher. More: www.alchemyworksevents.com
Cost: \$35. Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*June 12, 2021, Saturday, 9:00 am–3:00 pm EDT
LISTEN, an Art and Poetry Retreat
The Stable in Durham

This creative retreat invites you into simple writing experiences and unique art projects that will illuminate and awaken our early summer senses. All (and no) artistic and writing skills welcome! We’ll move between the serene sanctuary inside The Stable and the green grounds outside which feature a gorgeous labyrinth. Includes materials, lunch, & snacks.
Leaders: Claudia Fulshaw leads retreats that combine Art, Spirit, Nature & Rest. Mandy Mizelle is a chaplain, minister & writer. Both live in Durham.
Cost: \$125, Info: claudia@artwanders.com
Register: <https://artwanders.com/retreats/>

*June 15, July 20, Aug. 17, 2021, 7:00–8:30 pm EDT
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. Allowing our bodies, minds, and spirits to break down in the course of doing our work puts ourselves at risk and risks the integrity of our work. This series will offer practical tools for everyday self-care to Black women-identified people in all forms of ministry, in church and community.
Leader: Kimberly Gaubault (McCrae)
Cost: \$10 per session or \$25 for all 3 sessions.
Register: www.rcwms.org/events



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

June 16–July 14, 2021, Wed., 12:30–3:00 pm EDT
FINDING FREEDOM: White Women* Taking on Our Own White Supremacy (via Zoom)
A 5-part workshop to deepen individual & collective understanding of how we white women are complicit with white supremacy. (Women, gender-nonconforming, nonbinary, trans people, mixed-race, and white-passing people of color welcome.)
Facilitators: Evangeline Weiss and Kari Points.
Cost: \$75–\$475 (depending on ability to pay)
More: info@wearefindingfreedom.org

*June 17, 2021, Thursday, 12:00–2:00 pm EDT
MINDFUL WRITING FOR TRANSFORMATION with Jen Johnson (via Zoom)

Explore mindful writing as a practice of deep listening and writing for transformation. Will include writing activities to inspire you and support you in accessing inner wisdom and shifting your perspective. Writing about our experience can help us to make order from what feels like inner chaos and shape our stories into a cohesive and healing narrative. When we make time for deep listening to the stories inside that want to be told, we open the door to restoring a sense of inner wholeness. Workshop is for writers and non-writers.
Leader: Jen Johnson is a mindfulness teacher, therapist, photographer, and writer.
Cost: \$35. Register: www.rcwms.org/events

July 16–18, 2021, Friday–Sunday
LISTEN...YOUR SOUL IS SPEAKING: A SoulCollage® Immersive Experience at Well of Mercy
Explore the gentle, creative practice of SoulCollage® amidst the warm hospitality and natural beauty of Well of Mercy. No artistic ability required.
Leader: Becky Hambrick, MEd, SoulCollage® Facilitator, Spiritual Director, Enneagram Certified Practitioner
Cost: \$280 for single room, \$390 for cottage
Register: www.wellofmercy.org

August 26–29, 2021, Thursday–Sunday
SUMMER UNTENSIVE ON THE NC COAST
Trinity Retreat Center, Atlantic Beach, NC
An extended time of creative play with people who'll affirm and applaud you! Share stories, dancing, & song.
Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson
Contact: colleagues.interplay@gmail.com
Cost: \$300 for housing & meals. Plus gift to teachers.

*2nd Tuesday, monthly 11:30 am–1:30 pm EDT (Zoom)
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women
Info: www.rcwms.org/events (June 8 is the next one.)

Tuesdays, weekly, 11:15 am–12:30 pm Eastern Time
TUESDAYS WITH TILLIS, Indivisible Weekly Rally
Nonviolent community of resistance meets via Zoom.
Registration: Email name to jmwheele52@gmail.com.

Tuesdays, weekly, 7:00 pm–8:00 pm Eastern Time
MUSIC: takeOut jazz with mahaloJazz!
Join Alison Weiner for jazz every Tuesday evening.
Attend: www.facebook.com/mahaloArts/videos

3rd Thursday, monthly, 7:00 pm Eastern Time
TARA PRACTICE with Rachael Wooten (via Zoom)
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher, and author of *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*.
Cost: Free. Rachael: rachaelwootenauthor.com
More: www.bhumisparsha.org/events/

Ongoing, day or overnight options
SOLO WANDERINGS! Creative Retreats
The Stable, private retreat in Durham, NC
Eight self-guided offerings for 1–4 people.
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw is an artist and a creative retreat leader.
Cost: \$100 solo/\$65 additional person; plus overnight
Contact: artwanders.com, claudia@artwanders.com

*RCMWS Weeks of Quiet & Writing:
Sept. 19–26, 2021, Jan. 2–9, May 8–15, 2022

Tulsa

by Jeanette Stokes

I grew up white in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with a doctor father and a homemaker mother. As a child, I was mostly unaware of social justice issues and thought life in my town was pretty good. Known as the Oil Capital of the World in the 1940s, Tulsa had a booming economy, which drew my father to set up a medical practice there. At the fairgrounds, an enormous gold oilman, the “Golden Driller,” announced Tulsa’s dominance in the oil and gas industry.

The people I knew didn’t seem to think it was strange that my neighborhood, schools, and church were all white, so neither did I. I thought my neighborhood was diverse, because Dr. Lee, who was of Chinese descent, lived with his family on our block. Race and class sheltered me from the cruelest parts of living in the United States. Except for the assassination of President Kennedy, events that changed the country or the world mostly passed by without my noticing: Brown v. Board of Education, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the military build-up in Southeast Asia.

Growing up, I never heard anyone mention that Tulsa was home to the largest, deadliest race massacre in the history of the US. I never visited Northeast Tulsa, where the vast majority of Black people lived and the site of the 1921 Greenwood Massacre. I was mostly oblivious to how race and class functioned in my hometown.

I didn’t visit Greenwood until 2009, when I was in Tulsa to see my mother. I had begun reading about the massacre and decided I should at least drive by the area where it took place. Making my way through downtown and over to Greenwood, the first thing I noticed was the federal highway cutting right through the neighborhood. Destroyed by the massacre in 1921, the area was rebuilt and destroyed again by urban renewal and a highway in the 1960s. Today, there is a small business district that survived the massacre, a nice new Greenwood Cultural Center, and a campus of Oklahoma State University, but little of the once-thriving neighborhood.

I continued to think seriously about race and decided to attend the opening weekend of the EJI (Equal Justice Initiative) lynching memorial and slavery museum in Montgomery, Alabama in 2018. I walked through the open-air memorial reading the names of counties and victims, which were engraved on six-foot-tall steel monoliths suspended from the ceiling. I tried to keep breathing. Each one of the 800 monoliths represents an instance of racial terror and a lynching. Wondering when justice would ever come for Black people in this country, I turned to leave, looked up, and noticed the monolith that said, “Tulsa County, Oklahoma.”

I stood in stunned silence, feeling puzzled. I knew about the 1921 massacre in Tulsa that left dozens dead and hundreds homeless, when a mob of white men clashed with Black men on the courthouse lawn and proceeded to destroy Greenwood, a vibrant community with homes, businesses, theaters, restaurants, hotels, churches, and more.

The violence had been set off by an incident between a young Black man, Dick Rowland, and a white elevator operator. He probably bumped into her by accident, but he was charged with rape and arrested. Angry white men gathered on the courthouse lawn. Concerned that Rowland might be lynched, a crowd of

(Continued on back.)

Seventy...

list. We were going to Trinity Center at Salter Path once again!

As our retreat dates in early May approached, I got more and more excited. When I arrived on the island and saw the beach for the first time in over a year, I almost burst into tears. I had missed it so much. I walked out to my favorite deck on the sound side of the island, and months of tension fell away. Marsh grasses, the red winged blackbird, and the oysters sticking up out of the mud seemed to carry my worries away and fill my brain with sea air, big skies, and bird song. It felt like relief.

Who cares that the weather was unseasonably cold, rainy, and windy for the first ten days and that none of us brought enough warm clothes? I felt lucky to have packed a pair of long pants, a warm nightgown, and a down comforter, having thrown them in at the last minute, just in case.

The first week’s group arrived, and I set to work editing a manuscript of a memoir about how I got to be a feminist in religion. I’ve been working on it for years and have promised to finish it this year. Two weeks of writing and quiet were so satisfying that I arranged to stay a couple of extra days.

During the pandemic I had also missed walking in Duke Gardens. I live a block from East Campus and used to walk the gravel path that encircles campus nearly every day. But then a few years ago, there was too much construction: a Main Street bridge was replaced and some large shade trees were cut down. New dorms were built in one corner of the campus and a playing field in another. All that made it too noisy, dusty, or unpleasant to walk there for a while. So I started strolling through Sarah P. Duke Gardens several times a week instead. I got attached to the winding paths, the generous shade, and seasonal changes in the trees and flower beds.

I was in the Gardens the day they were closed to the public last year in March. The temporary safety measure dragged on through summer, fall, winter, and spring. I’ve walked around the periphery of the gardens a few times and snuck in when I couldn’t stand it anymore, to check out the hellebores or cherry blossoms. I especially enjoyed walking through cherry blossom snow in late March, but it was not relaxing. I don’t like breaking rules and was nervous about getting yelled at by protective garden staff.

I walked from my house to my office most days during the many months of the pandemic. It was only about half a mile, and the round trip provided some much-needed exercise and change of scene. Since I was almost the only person using our office for months and months, I established a pleasant routine. After about nine months, I grew tired of monotony and started walking in other neighborhoods in town and longing for the the Duke Gardens to open again.

Finally, in May I received a message that the Gardens would open to the public again on June 1 with a “premiere” for members beginning on May 26. I checked to be sure my membership was current and made a reservation for my birthday. I feel like the luckiest person in the world. This year for my seventieth birthday I got two weeks at the beach and walk in the beautiful Duke Gardens.



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

Tulsa...

Black men gathered also. Someone fired a shot and by the next day, thirty-five blocks of Greenwood had been looted and destroyed. Whole families fled for their lives and never came back. Others were rounded up by police and national guardsmen and detained. Some of the murdered were buried in unmarked graves. We still don't know the death toll.

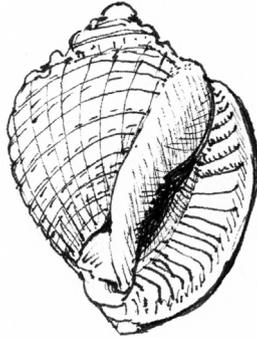
It was horrible, but I had not thought of it as a lynching. Calling the white looters and killers a lynch mob seemed peculiar, so I looked up the word "lynch." There I discovered that lynch refers to a mob that kills someone, especially by hanging, for an alleged offense with or without a legal trial. The killing and massive destruction in Tulsa fit the definition, and fit into a history of white people attacking and destroying Black communities in this country. Greenwood had been so prosperous that it was called Black Wall Street (just like Durham, NC).

As I watched a violent mob attack the US Capitol on January 6 this year, it occurred to me that they looked like a lynch mob. Some carried Confederate flags, and some said they wanted to lynch Vice President Pence for not overturning the 2020 presidential election results. The mob killed one Capitol Police officer, and others died from their injuries. We can only imagine what the mob might have done had they gotten their hands on senators, representatives, or the vice president.

The attack on the Capitol also reminded me of the white supremacist group that overthrew the democratically elected government of Wilmington, NC in 1898. A mob of white men, including future North Carolina governors, business leaders, and white newspaper owners, staged a coup and threw out a biracial city council that had been elected by a fusion coalition. After burning the Black newspaper building and running prominent Black people out of town at gunpoint, they installed a white city government more to their liking.

When Black communities did well or when Black and white people cooperated politically, whites sometimes responded with violence. Tulsa and Wilmington are only two of the many US cities in which a violent white mob attacked a Black community.

No one was ever punished for crimes committed in Tulsa or in Wilmington. No Black people were ever compensated for the loss of life, property, or future earnings. Tulsa even made it hard for Black people to rebuild. The white people tried to pass an ordinance saying buildings had to be rebuilt with brick, because wooden houses were dangerous. What was dangerous was white hatred of Black success and a legal system that deliberately overlooked violence against Black people.



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

Essay Contest

RCWMS is committed to supporting women as they find their voices and make them heard. In addition to writing classes, workshops, and retreats, we run an annual essay contest. Our 2021 Essay Contest is open for submissions June 15 through July 31, 2021. 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 themes of identity and belonging. Oppressive systems and structures seek to prevent us from living into the complexities of our identities and lived experiences. How do you know when you are showing up as your full self and experiencing true belonging?

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. 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 and close July 31, 2021.

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 2021.

NOTIFICATION: Winners will be notified by email.



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. 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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