

South of the Garden

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

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September 2021

Fall

by Rebecca Welper

I never know whether to think of fall as an ending or a beginning. My vegetable garden will peter out, trees will lose their leaves, darkness will slowly creep in. Summer days at the pool will draw to a close. Peaches will lose their juicy flavor.

But apples will crisp. Pumpkins swell. Hikes will beckon on cool afternoons. Gorgeous sunsets will grab my attention at dinner time. A new school year will begin.

Five years ago, when I sweated through the summer with the baby strapped to me—pudgy, sweet-smelling flesh sticking to mine—I couldn't imagine prepping her for the first day of kindergarten. All I knew were diapers, sleeplessness, and getting enough calories into her day and night. Now we're at the ending of her early childhood and this phase of my life as a mostly stay-at-home mom. We're at the beginning of her school years, when she starts joining the broader community as a little citizen. It all feels like a very slippery slope to college drop off, if you ask me. But maybe because the pandemic has given us extra togetherness these last eighteen months, I feel ready for change. We've been doing our best to get the kindergartener ready as well!

I guess the "equi" in autumnal equinox gives us a pretty clear indication: it's a time of balance, of endings and beginnings. At RCWMS, we're having our share of both. In August, we said goodbye to Rachel Sauls, our fabulous Anita McLeod Fellow. We have recently welcomed Beth Weiss as a data manager and Mary Coffman as this fall's Anita McLeod Intern. Tsharre Sanders and Fran Wescott are joining as very part-time Anita McLeod Interns in the fall and will work with us more in the spring. For a time this summer, it seemed like we would see an end to virtual staff meetings and programs. Not so fast.

We do have opportunities for you to experience new beginnings, if you're willing to stick with Zoom for now. New programs this fall include Poetry Across Borders, with Linda Ehrlich, and Quilts, Quilting, and Soul, with Jereann King Johnson. We are also continuing the monthly programs Ministry of Black Women's Self-Care, with Kim Gaubault, and Art of Conscious Aging. Carol Henderson returns to offer Prompt by Prompt: Writing and More Writing.

This summer, my aunt's memorial service opened with these words from Mary Oliver: "To live in this world / you must be able / to do three things: / to love what is mortal; / to hold it / against your / bones knowing / your own life depends on it; / and, when the time comes to let it / go, / to let it go." In the fall, nature reminds us how to let go. We may experience beauty and sadness. Perhaps resistance. And then, maybe, hope.



Zinnias

by Jeanette Stokes

I've been trying to find summer this year because I all but missed it last year. I started my search with flowers. Since zinnias are my favorite summer flowers, I usually plant some in our backyard garden. This year's batch is particularly healthy because my husband amended the soil before I planted the seeds. But I was disappointed that the zinnias I put in a vase on the breakfast table were fading quickly—all of them, the ones from the Durham Farmers' Market and the ones from the garden. When I mentioned this problem to one of the farmers, he reported, "Some people are getting fourteen days out of our zinnias!" Wow, that would be great. I was only hoping for seven days. "What's the trick?" I asked. He explained that zinnias require very clean water and that he regularly scrubs and bleaches his flower buckets.

Being of "the English school of flower arranging," I like to cut the flowers, bring them into the house, and jam them into a vase. I almost always pour the old flower water out and put in some new, but I rarely clean the vase. So I thought I'd give it a try. I scrubbed the blue glass vase I've been using for the last few weeks and let it dry completely. Then I put in clean water from the tap and added newly gathered zinnias from the garden. *Voila!* They lasted a whole week. Some lasted even longer.

Wouldn't it be nice if other problems were as easy to solve? We've been living with a dreadful pandemic for a year and a half now. While most of my relatives have stayed healthy, other friends and acquaintances have not been as fortunate. I've been wearing a mask and advising others to do the same.

My pandemic problems are mostly "first world" problems: having to change the way RCWMS works, missing friends, and coping with monotony and sometimes boredom. When I got vaccinated earlier this year, it came as a huge relief. I was less anxious and began to move around more freely. But now things are getting worse again. We're told that the Delta variant is more contagious and more virulent than the original strain. I ate inside a few restaurants this summer and wore a mask when I wasn't chewing, but I won't be doing that again any time soon. RCWMS even has a couple of weeks at the beach planned for later this year. Will we be able to go? No one really knows.

Last summer passed without much of what felt like summer to me. One day blending into the next. I never even put on a bathing suit. This year when we were allowed to move around more, I made sure to do some things that felt like summer. I walked in Duke Gardens when it reopened, attended two RCWMS writing weeks at the beach, and ate yummy chocolate popsicles. But it still didn't feel like summer.

Then one Wednesday afternoon in early August, I finally found it. I found summer! I had been looking

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

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

September 3–October 29, 2021
SAFE SPACES, NORTH CAROLINA: The Works of Bryant Holsenbeck
Blue Spiral Gallery, Asheville, NC
Environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck, Robert Johnson, and Will Baker are featured in this exhibit.
Contact: www.bluespiral1.com

*Sept. 13, 20, 27, Oct. 4, 2021, Mondays, 7–8:00 pm EDT
POETRY ACROSS BORDERS with Linda Ehrlich (Zoom)
Let's explore Japanese, Chinese, and Middle Eastern poetry from earlier centuries! This 4-session workshop offers a chance to read and even try your own hand at poetry from outside of familiar European traditions. The class will include a look at landscape painting and poetry from China; tanka, haiku, and zuihitsu ("follow the brush") from Japan; and ghazals from the Persian/Urdu tradition. There will be a particular focus on women poets, and on the ties between poetry and the visual arts. Classes will include informational talks, break-out sessions, and readings. An optional group visit to Duke Gardens' Asiatic Arboretum is possible.
Leader: Linda Ehrlich, PhD, visiting faculty member at Duke in the History Dept., has more than 25 years' experience teaching and writing about world literature, cinema, and theatre.
Cost: \$40 (Zoom link sent with ticket confirmation.)
Register: www.rcwms.org/events
Contact: RCWMS, info@rcwms.org

*September 16, 2021, 7:00–8:30 pm EDT
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE: A Series with Kim Gaubault (via Zoom)
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: \$10-40
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

*October 3, 2021, Sunday, 2:00–3:00 pm EDT
QUILTS, QUILTING, AND SOUL with Jereann King Johnson (via Zoom)
For as far back as she can remember, Jereann King Johnson has pieced and slept under quilts. Her early discovery of and fondness for textiles and textures flourishes still. Her quilt making is inspired by ethnic designs, works of art, nature, personal stories, history, and traditional quilt patterns. For her, quilting is a dynamic metaphor for living, for community development, and for creative expression—putting pieces, oftentimes discarded pieces, together to make something new. Join us as Jereann shares the magic of quilts and quilting in her life. Prepare to learn and be inspired.
Leader: Fiber artist Jereann King Johnson helped to launch the African American Quilt Circle in 1997 and the Heritage Quilters in 2001.
Cost: \$10
Register: www.rcwms.org/events. Info: info@rcwms.org

October 6, 13 & 20, 2021, Wednesdays, 4:00–6:00 pm
WRAPPING WILD: Making Textile Sculptures out of Recycled Materials (via Zoom)
Pocosin Arts School, Columbia, NC



Illustration by Julia Illana

Make textile sculptures out of the stuff we throw away.
Leader: Environmental artist Bryant Holsenbeck
Cost: \$190
Register: pocosinarts.org/zoom-workshops-books-mixed-media/

*October 7, 14, 21, 28; Nov. 4, 11, 18; & Dec. 2, 2021, Thursdays, 12:00–1:15 pm Eastern Time
PROMPT BY PROMPT: WRITING AND MORE WRITING with Carol Henderson (via Zoom)
In this generative writing workshop, taking place over eight sessions, we will write in response to carefully selected prompts—two, maybe three, each session. As with all the prompts Carol offers, you can run with them literally or go wherever your thoughts and feelings take you. We will have time for a few readings during each session. Come prepared to write a lot, to go deep, and to be surprised. Open to writers of all levels and genres.
Leader: Carol Henderson, writer and workshop leader.
Cost: \$160. (Zoom link sent with ticket confirmation.)
Register: www.rcwms.org/events
Contact: RCWMS, info@rcwms.org

Fall dates available.
FINDING FREEDOM: White Women* Taking on Our Own White Supremacy (via Zoom)
This 5-part online workshop aims to deepen our individual and collective understanding of how we as white women are complicit with white supremacy. The workshop supports participants to live more deeply and consistently into our racial justice commitments and move ourselves and people in our networks to join the fight for racial, economic, and gender justice right now.
*All women and gender-nonconforming, nonbinary, and trans people, and all mixed-race and white-passing people of color are welcome.
Cost: \$50–\$300
Register: wearefindingfreedom.org

*2nd Tuesday, monthly 11:30 am–1:30 pm Eastern Time (via Zoom)
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women
Info: www.rcwms.org/events (September 14 is the next gathering for this group.)

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*.
More on Rachael: rachaelwootenauthor.com
Cost: Free. Info: 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 one to four people.
Leader: Claudia Fulshaw, artist & 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, Sept. 26–Oct. 3, 2021
Jan. 2–9, May 1–8, May 8–15, 2022

Stand Up

"Stand Up for Jesus" by Karen Sandler won first place in the 2021 RCWMS Essay Contest.

As a twelve-year-old, in 1968, spending a lazy July week with five girlfriends in Highlands, North Carolina, seemed to me the closest thing to heaven. Debbie's grandparents would host, and they instructed us to call them Munner and Gang-Gang, just like Debbie did. We'd spend the week at their vacation home overlooking a manicured golf course on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains, hanging out by the pool at the club house, whiling away the breezy summer afternoons in comparative freedom.

I worried about being late as my parents drove slowly down Habersham Road, looking for the house where we were to meet Debbie's grandparents. The car snaked up the winding drive leading to the mansion with its limestone façade, cobblestoned courtyard, and terraced steps, nestled in the bucolic hills of the wealthiest part of Atlanta.

Once gathered, we set out in a convoy of two gleaming Lincoln Continentals, one white, one black, each driven by one of the grandparents, gliding towards the Blue Ridge Mountains. The oppressive summer heat gave way to cool mountain air as we entered the Appalachians.

Our excitement climbed as the car zigzagged through hairpin curves to higher elevations. We chattered and sang "Hey Jude," quietly, mindful not to annoy Munner, our chauffeur, whom we barely knew. When we could no longer contain ourselves, we roared with laughter, pushing each other from one side to the other across the slippery leather seat as the car rounded another steep curve. No one had seatbelts then, of course.

"How you girls doing back there?" Munner asked, as we rounded another turn.

"Great!" Ann answered. "I think this car rides even better than a Cadillac!"

"Glad you like it! We don't care much for Cadillacs. Wouldn't want anyone thinking we're Jews, who only care about money."

Before I could think, the words flew out of my mouth. "Jews don't just care about money. I'm Jewish." I felt the blood rushing up my neck. I wondered if I'd been rude.

"Well, I didn't know that!" Munner chirped. "With those pretty blue eyes of yours and blond hair, I wouldn't have guessed. Well, don't you worry. You know, the Bible says Jews are God's chosen people."

I was no stranger to anti-Semitic cracks, nor was Munner the first person to comment that I couldn't be Jewish due to my fair complexion. Munner didn't seem the least bit repentant about any discomfort she might have caused me. On the contrary, she focused on me like a laser, and as the days passed, her goal became clearer.

We started each meal with grace, invoking Jesus' name, with Bible citations alluding to the eternal damnation awaiting those who don't accept Jesus. The other girls bowed their heads at the table, while I kept mine up, defying the uncomfortable assault as respectfully as I could. Gang-Gang joined us, bowing his head too while his wife prayed on and on, but we saw little of him, since he spent most of his time on the golf course.



I dreaded those excruciating moments before each meal. I was old enough to understand that Munner's explicit prayers were less about her devotion than a challenge to any notion I might have that I belonged among this group of Christian girls, even though I'd known them most of my life. I could have coped and swatted away the sense of isolation that crept over me during those few minutes each day until one afternoon, near the end of the week, when Munner asked me to step into her bedroom for a chat.

"You're almost 13," she said, in her treacly Southern accent. "For Jewish people that means you're almost an adult, so you must make your own decisions. It doesn't matter what your parents say. Accept Jesus into your heart, and you'll have eternal life."

"I'm Jewish," I stammered. "We don't believe in Jesus."

"I know. But you're such a lovely girl. I don't want you to spend eternity in hell."

"I don't believe my parents are going to hell," I mumbled.

She pressed on. "Maybe if you accept Jesus, they will too. Just think about it. Will you do that for me?"

I knew that unless I agreed, she wouldn't let me leave the room.

I groped my way down the hall afterwards into the bedroom I shared with the other girls, closed the door, and sat on the bed, sobbing uncontrollably. I harbored no fear of going to hell, but here on earth I felt thoroughly alone.

One by one, the girls trickled into the room. Ann sat next to me on the bed. The other girls crowded around, saying nothing.

"I just want her to stop," I said, through my tears. "I just want her to leave me alone."

The girls sheepishly looked at Debbie, who didn't defend her grandmother, but offered no assurances either. "Maybe she'll calm down now that she's talked with you," she suggested hopefully.

After several awkward minutes, we emerged from the room and pretended nothing had happened.

We left Highlands the following Sunday morning.

"We'll make a little stop before we leave town." Munner announced. "Wear something nice because we'll go out for Sunday lunch afterwards."

It never occurred to me we'd be going to church despite all the praying we'd done during the week. On that dazzling summer Carolina morning, the salt and pepper Lincoln Continentals pulled up in front of a small, white Baptist church tucked in a beautiful grove of trees. Somehow, we found an entire row among the packed pews, where we could all sit together. Munner waved right and left, greeting folks she knew, everyone nodding and smiling back in recognition.

The preacher's words echoed Munner's, promising damnation for all like me who failed to accept Jesus

Stand Up...

as lord and savior. The other girls comfortably joined in the hymns. At the end of the sermon, the preacher cleared his throat and made an announcement. "I understand there's one among us who hasn't accepted Jesus into her heart. I want all of you who have accepted Jesus to stand up. Stand up for Jesus!" Every person stood as I stayed glued to my seat. Scores of eyes searched me out, especially Munner, who leaned forward and tried to catch my eye. I looked straight ahead. Nothing could have made me stand up. Or acknowledge her.

At home, my father became livid as he learned about my ordeal with Munner. "I'm going to call her right now!" He screamed. "I'll let her know what I think of her, doing that to a child! That anti-Semitic bitch!" My father was a genial man, slow to anger, but once provoked, he could explode. He'd served in the army during WWII, as most in our extended family still living in Europe were perishing in the Holocaust. I suppose my resolve not to stand up for Jesus came from him. My mother managed to calm him down and he never made the call.

Besides, I hadn't stood up for Jesus, but I did stand up for myself.

Karen Sandler is retired, having held jobs in publishing and financial services. More recently she has served on and chaired several non-profit boards. An inveterate English major who somehow ended up in a quantitative field, she is a founding member of the Luscious Literati, a group of wise women writers with much to say, who hope to publish before they perish. Past essays and opinion pieces have appeared in the Washington Post. She holds a BA degree in English and Music from Emory University, as well a Chartered Financial Analyst certification (ret.).



Belonging was the theme of the 2021 RCWMS Essay Contest. We asked writers to consider how they knew when they were showing up as themselves and experiencing true belonging. We are grateful to the contest judges: Solita Denard, Marya McNeish, Rachel Sauls, and Marion Thullbery.

First place goes to Karen Sandler for "Stand Up for Jesus." Second place goes to Olivia Brown of Miami, Florida, for "A Vixen's Prayer." Third place goes to F. I. Goldhaber of Portland, Oregon, for "Searching for Identity: Finding Words." Honorable Mention goes to Meredith Blaise for "Pretty in Practice: A Meditation on the Mutual Exclusion of Vanity and Intellect." Many thanks to all who entered. Please, keep writing and consider entering next year.



Illustration by Julia Illana

Zinnias...

for it among the zinnias in my garden, in the piles of tomatoes at the farmers' market, in the sweet red flesh of a watermelon. And while all of those things were indeed summer treats, it turns out that what I was looking for was a sense of unhurried days that summer sometimes offers.

The trick is that you can't go chasing around looking for it. Trying hard and hurrying seem to push it away. Summer finally found me that week when I didn't have many commitments, on an afternoon when I wasn't sure what to do with myself. I let myself read a bit, take a nap, and then turned my attention to a new pile of fabric I had been given.

I've been quilting a bit this year. I don't actually know what I'm doing. I just cut up pieces of fabric and stitch them together any which-a-way, stitch more together, and then sew those together. I seem to enjoy sewing rectangles and squares together into long strips. Sometimes I cut the strips apart and sew them back together a different way. It entertains me the way making paper collages can or the way making handmade books did last year during the pandemic. I lose myself, and in losing myself, I rest at a deeper level. And that's the summer feeling I was looking for.



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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