

# South of the Garden

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

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## Spring

by Rebecca Welper

Sometimes this pandemic has felt like we're stuck in an endless string of Februaries. Cooped up for too long, we're desperate for a carefree spring to arrive.

Spring almost by definition means hope. Bright crocuses peek out from drab surroundings. More daylight and milder weather whisper many promises. Rebirth is all around. It's hard not to get swept up in all this hopefulness. After all, couldn't we all use some rebirth, after everything we've been through?

As we start to emerge from the pandemic, I think many of us are figuring out what we want this new normal to look like. Many workers are figuring out how to collectively improve pay, benefits, and work/life balance—by participating in the Great Resignation and negotiating better terms at the next job, or by forming labor unions. I feel hopeful about high-profile stories of successful unionization at Starbucks, ongoing organizing at Amazon, and unions forming closer to home, including at Duke University Press.

When people come together with hope and creativity—and roll their sleeves up and get to work—amazing things can happen. It's hard to feel that sense of hopefulness when we've been isolated and stuck. Now I'm not talking about Covid anymore. I'm talking about our political bubbles.

Last fall I attended a Zoom debate about vaccine mandates, hosted by an organization called Braver Angels. Their mission is to "bring Americans together to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic." They host workshops and trainings and sponsor local chapters where self-identified "reds" and "blues" get together to build relationships and work together. I was impressed with the Zoom debate. It was very structured, giving equal time to the pro and con sides. It occurred to me how rare it is these days to be present (even virtually) with people who hold strongly opposing views, yet who are engaging civilly together, actually speaking and listening to one another. I attended with a cousin of mine who is on the opposite side of this issue. Afterward, we each agreed that our respective views weren't changed by attending the debate, but we appreciated the respect and humanity that everyone there was afforded. To rebuild respect among all kinds of people in this country seems hopeful to me.

In upcoming workshops this spring, we'd like to share hope with you—of getting a better night's sleep (A Souther Sleep Sominar for Clergy Folk with Betty Wolfe); reckoning with the past (Pauli Murray Book Club with historian Dr. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers), reclaiming the darkness of night (Our Disappearing Darkness & Recreating Prehistoric Night with MJ Sharp); or finding peace along the journey (Ecumenical Holy Week Labyrinth Walk at Binkley Baptist Church). When we step outside and breathe the fresh air of spring, may we find hope all around.



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

## Sue

by Jeanette Stokes

Sue Sneddon painted and drew the North Carolina Coast for more than forty years. In recent years, her paintings of the coast have appeared in annual calendars created by Emerald Isle Realty and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum. For the 2022 calendar, Sue decided to paint the creeks and sounds of "Down East," the name given by locals to the coastal area between Beaufort and Cedar Point.

In May 2021 RCWMS sponsored two back-to-back weeks of writing retreats at Trinity Center in Salter Path, about fifteen miles down the coast from Beaufort. At the end of the regularly scheduled weeks, a few of us were able to stay a few extra days. Since we had extra room in our retreat house, I asked Sue if she wanted to join us. She said that would be great, since she had some work to do in the area. The work turned out to be visiting and photographing Down East creeks and sounds.

One of those days, Sue invited me to go exploring with her. I almost declined, thinking I should stay in my room and write. But then I thought, "An artist of the first order has invited me to go look at the world with her. What am I waiting for?" So I jumped in Sue's van and we took off for points unknown to me.

First we drove to Fort Macon, at the eastern tip of the island that includes Emerald Isle, Salter Path, and Atlantic Beach. Though I've been going to Emerald Isle for decades, I had never explored the beaches at Fort Macon. I snapped a sweet picture of Sue on a sandy path, carrying her walking stick and notepad as she headed toward the beach. After tromping around on the wide beach under a bright blue sky, we drove on through little towns like Otway and Straits, and made it to Harkers Island for a fifteen-minute visit to the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum before it closed for the day.

Afterward, we found a small body of water called Goose Bay that Sue could see on the map but had not been able to find on the ground. This time her driving and my navigating got us there. Along the way, I noticed a small road on the map that looked like it led to a cove. Curious, I insisted we follow the narrow dirt track to see where it led. Here's the way Sue recounted it later:

...and Sue said to Jeanette—"I don't go down dirt roads like this." Jeanette's reply was "do not worry Sue—you are with your minister." At the end of the narrowing dirt road, we were greeted by a young man and his barking big dog. He said—"you know this is private property." Jeanette in her aqua bonnet and cardigan sweater told the guy who we were and what we were doing. She chatted with him while Sue took photos. She asked him what he called this creek. (Sue had been confused by other names.) "Whitehurst Creek," he said. Thank you Jeanette...

(Continued on back.)

# Calendar

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

\*March 13, 2022, Sunday, 1:00–4:00 pm Eastern Time  
FLASH OF SLIVER: Writing with Laurel Ferejohn  
Enjoy creating to prompts.  
Leader: Laurel Ferejohn, writer and independent editor, with publications of flash fiction, flash memoir, short stories, essays, and poetry.  
Cost: \$25. This event is FULL with a waiting list.  
Contact: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events)

\*March 16, 2021, (3rd Wednesdays) 7:00–8:30 pm Eastern  
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. Allowing our bodies, minds, and spirits to break down in the course of doing our work puts ourselves and our work at risk. This series offers 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](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*March 20, 2022, 1:00–2:30 pm Eastern (via Zoom)  
OUR DISAPPEARING DARKNESS & RECREATING PREHISTORIC NIGHT with MJ Sharp  
In a virtual slideshow and discussion, MJ will present her photographic works-in-progress and discusses her attempts to recreate the experience of night at bronze-age megaliths. She is investigating what we lose when we lose night and darkness to light pollution.  
Leader: Photographer MJ Sharp is a Lecturing Fellow at Duke's Center for Documentary Studies and a Fulbright Scholar in Cornwall, England. See: [www.mjsharp.com](http://www.mjsharp.com)  
Cost: \$10, \$25, or \$50  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

March 24 & 25, 2022, Thurs & Fri, 1:00–3:30 pm Eastern  
A SOUNDER SLEEP SOMINAR® for Clergy Folk with Betty Wolfe (via Zoom)  
Access the wisdom of your own living, breathing body to create profound rest and restorative sleep. Designed to accommodate clergy availability.  
Leader: Betty Wolfe, MDiv, GCFP™  
Cost: \$80 prior to March 22; \$95 after March 22.  
Info: [bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com](mailto:bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com), 919-794-4139

\*March 29, 2022, 1:00–3:00 pm Eastern Time  
HISTORIC STAGVILLE TOUR  
5828 Old Oxford Highway, Durham, NC 27712  
Join Stagville staff, RCWMS folk, and others to learn more about the lives and work of enslaved people at Stagville, one of the largest plantations in NC. The Bennehan-Cameron family owned approximately 30,000 acres and enslaved about 900 people on this property. Historic Stagville protects some of the land from the plantation, including original housing for enslaved people, a massive barn, and a Bennehan house.  
Cost: \$10 per person.  
Register: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events)

March 30 & April 27, 2022, Wed, 6:30–7:30 pm Eastern  
PAULI MURRAY BOOK CLUB (via Zoom)  
A two-part conversation with historian Dr. Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, author of *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*. Jones-Rogers shows that slave-owning white women actively participated in the slave market, profited from it, and used it for economic and social empowerment.  
Register: [bit.ly/PMCMAR22BOOK](http://bit.ly/PMCMAR22BOOK)



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

April 7 & 21, 2022, 12:30–1:30 pm Eastern  
LUNCH BREAK "PLAY" DATE: Writing Workshop  
Join us for this two-part interactive workshop and learn how to write a 10-minute play.  
Leader: Rebecca Welper, MFA, has a master's in play-writing from Catholic University of America.  
Cost: \$25–\$50. Must attend both sessions.  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*April 10–17, 2022  
ECUMENICAL HOLY WEEK LABYRINTH WALK  
Binkley Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC  
Sponsors: Several Chapel Hill churches  
Free and open to the public. Please wear clean socks.  
More info: [rcwms.org/events](http://rcwms.org/events)

July 21–24, 2022 or August 25–28, 2022  
SUMMER INTERPLAY UNTENSIVES (in person)  
Trinity Center, near Morehead City, NC  
We need more PLAY these days! Come on down to the ocean for time to relax, hang out and enjoy nature.  
Leaders: Ginny Going and Tom Henderson  
Cost: \$315 double room & meals, \$375 single  
Contact: [ginny.going@gmail.com](mailto:ginny.going@gmail.com)

\*2nd Tuesday, monthly, 11:30 am–1:30 pm Eastern Time (via Zoom)  
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women (March 8 is the next gathering for this group.)  
Info: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

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

Wednesdays, weekly, 5:30–6:30 & 7–8:00 pm Eastern  
MUSIC: takeOut jazz with mahaloJazz!  
Join Alison Weiner for jazz every Tuesday evening.  
Info: The Eddy, 336-535-2010.

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](http://rachaelwootenauthor.com)  
Cost: Free. Info: [www.bhumisparsha.org/events/](http://www.bhumisparsha.org/events/)

Many dates available.  
FINDING FREEDOM: White Women\* Taking on Our Own White Supremacy (via Zoom)  
This 5-part online workshop aims to deepen our understanding of how we as white women are complicit with white supremacy. Learn to live more deeply into your racial justice commitments and join the fight for racial, economic, and gender justice right now.  
\*All women, gender-nonconforming, trans, mixed-race and white-passing people of color welcome.  
Cost: \$50–\$300  
Register: [wearefindingfreedom.org](http://wearefindingfreedom.org)

Ongoing, day or overnight options  
SOLO WANDERINGS! Creative Retreats  
The Stable, private retreat in Durham, NC  
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](http://artwanders.com), [claudia@artwanders.com](mailto:claudia@artwanders.com)

\*RCWMS Weeks of QUIET & WRITING  
May 1–8, 2022; May 8–15, 2022, September 18–25, 2022  
Leader: Jeanette Stokes, except May 8–15 will be led by Carol Henderson.  
For information, contact Jeanette at [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org).

# Vixen

"A Vixen's Prayer" by Olivia Brown won second place in the 2021 RCWMS Essay Contest.

I recently started wearing shorts again. For years, they represented a war within myself that my compromise meant I was losing. The moment I went into hiding was four years ago, while I was a tour guide in college. One day, an older white woman said she didn't want her family to receive a tour from me. My shorts were "too short."

My shorts weren't any shorter than anyone else's so I don't know if it was my 5'10" stature, Blackness, or the hips and thighs they come with that set her off but this incident was just as triggering for me as it was for her. These shorts represented years of compromising because I learned early that if girls like me, smart girls, high achieving girls, wanted to be taken seriously then we should strive to never be sexy or promiscuous; and my body, large, cornbred and oxtail fed, would automatically be deemed both upon first glance meaning I had to work harder to combat my own sexualization.

I learned this lesson over and over again through my youth with every "you're too smart for that" and "girls like you shouldn't wear/do/be that." So really, the shorts that offended this woman took years to select. Even though managing her reaction to me and my shorts wasn't my responsibility, not passing her litmus test, after I had virtually been groomed for her comfort, made me feel embarrassed, vulnerable and like a failure. I wanted, just for a second, to be smaller, whiter, less voluptuous, more palatable, because I wanted to prove I was good and mature, even in this body. Reflecting on this now I realize how my understanding of my development as a woman was rooted solely in my mental and emotional growth. I couldn't defend myself or my body because I didn't take pride in it. I didn't take pride in my body because I didn't know I could; I was taught to see it as a hindrance to my intelligence and upward mobility. My brain had somehow become separate from my body, and my body separate from my womanhood.

From then on, I stopped wearing shorts as a way to protect myself from judgement and to focus solely on my mental and emotional growth. Physical maturity was only important in sex. I didn't realize I was assimilating to oppression. Nevermind what this taught me about my body, and the racism, anti-Blackness, misogyny and fatphobia that influenced the teachings, this taught me that women could only be valuable either in an intellectual way or a physical way, never both. Which couldn't be further from my truth.

As an adult, I reclaim my body and mind to practice unapologetic ownership of all of myself. In my poem, "A Vixen's Prayer" I say "my body is mine. God gave it to me." As a reminder to myself that the body I have, I belong in. I'm not the sum of my parts, I am whole. It would be beneficial to the systems I've listed for me to not truly see or appreciate my body. They would prefer my dichotomous understanding of intelligence and womanhood to maintain the status quo but freedom for me is embracing "both, and" and rejecting anything that forces me into "either, or." Now, I'm putting my pieces back together, wearing shorts, and celebrating my wholeness, not merely compartmentalized parts. The remainder of this essay is the full "A Vixen's



Drawing by Sue Sneddon

Prayer" poem. May these words be a reckoning for anyone who tries to impose their views onto those who dare divest from the status quo and a revolution for women navigating their nuances with confidence and certainty amidst unnecessary judgement.

"A Vixen's Prayer"

I hope my thighs are the antagonist,  
The main and only character  
in your nightmares.  
Oh!  
I'm overcome by the idea that hell,  
for you,  
Is being forever haunted by my femoral region.

I see it now,  
One evening,  
You'll put on your nightdress  
It flows to your ankles  
For no other reason but that  
People like you associate the length with  
highness, You lazily pray,  
Like always,  
Half-assedly giving my Lord and Saviour your soul to  
keep, Never suspecting you'd actually pass away,  
Find yourself in the devil's homestay  
Or that Lucifer would have you answering to me.

People like you  
Who abuse the Word  
To make my body your business  
As if my ass is somehow a stranger to His vision,  
As if Lord don't love a Vixen,  
People like you burn the hottest.  
So I know you is thirsty baby.  
"Want a drink" I'll say sweetly and you'll sigh with  
relief Happy that I'm not the villain you made me out  
to be  
You'll nod and be reminded of your sin, then,  
When I turn around and pull the coolest confection  
From my thong.  
And this is your reality  
Offended  
Till eternity's end.

You think you made me insecure  
Because I'm giddy at your despair?  
No.  
I don't care too much about you, anything you do, or  
your  
kind. We both here to live  
Yet, you think you have a say over yourself, all your  
parts and mine  
And for that I won't make time.

My body is mine.  
God gave it to me.  
"Celebrate and adorn as you see fit, My Child"  
He said as he put the finishing touches on the blueprint  
My body is my grandma,  
My momma,  
All the greats before them,  
My cousins and my aunts  
My confidence is too  
For it was carefully cultivated by women who taught  
me that there'd be a lot of yous  
A lot of people who'll never call me beautiful  
A lot of people who want me to be smaller, quieter, and  
less for their comfort

(Continued on back.)

# Vixen...

I thank God that I know the word and don't have to  
use you as a translator  
I thank God for the lineage that taught me my worth

You see, there's deep ancestral code pulsing through  
my veins  
So how dare you try to punish me,  
Profess that I'm less  
Or try to change my name  
When I know our Lord told you the same?  
It then dawned on me,  
You must be in so much pain.  
Ashamed,  
Drained  
From perpetuating a system that polices you  
That you willingly subscribe to  
because policing me  
Is more important than being free

This is my prayer for you Miss Holier Than Thou,  
I pray for your autonomy  
I pray for your speedy release from limiting beliefs  
I pray you learn that the power my body is blessed  
with is available to you too  
I pray you don't raise youth to do what you do  
I pray one day, you too, chose to be powerful  
Pray you realize that your reaction to me, is a reflection  
of you  
But mostly, my wish is this,  
Even if to my prayers you never take heed  
I pray when you find yourself face to face with a free  
woman like me  
You have enough sanctity or sense  
Not to speak.  
Or, that you have on good running shoes  
Because if you do, the sacred trio of me, karma and  
my family tree  
Will be running after you.

*Olivia Brown, MPH, CHES, (she/her) hails from Miami, Florida. She is a health educator, essayist, poet, Black liberation scholar, digital creator and culture critic. She hosts the podcast Stream of (Social) Consciousness where she uses pop culture and trending topics to analyze and teach about social systems. She is also a fashion enthusiast and bibliophile who loves yoga, roller-skating, and adventure.*

# Sue...

It was a lovely afternoon and I felt so lucky to have seen such beautiful places with my dear friend Sue who taught me to look at the natural world and see it more clearly. Whenever I was with her, she pointed out the glint on the water, a bird in the air, or the way the sun made the top of a branch so much lighter than the underside.

Little did I know that our outing Down East would be my last trip with Sue. In November she began to have pain in her abdomen, went to the doctor, had imaging, got an appointment at Duke in December, had cancer surgery on December 21, and died on January 10 of cancer that had spread like wildfire. I can't begin to say how much I miss her and how much I owe to Sue for helping me to see and to more fully appreciate the beauty of our fragile planet.

*Sue Sneddon (September 7, 1953–January 10, 2022) was born in Uniontown, PA. She lived in Durham for many years and finally in Shallotte, on the NC coast. Her work was exhibited in many galleries, including Craven Allen in Durham, where a retrospective of her work will take place in September 2022. She is survived by her wife, Donna Giles, two sisters, Nance and Jo Sneddon, and scores of friends.*



RCWMS is a forty-four-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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Drawing by Sue Sneddon



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