

# South of the Garden

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

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## Forty-five

by Jeanette Stokes

When friends and I started the Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South in 1977, we never imagined it would still be a vibrant and going concern 45 years later, but here we are. And what a blessing it is to have had such wonderful colleagues, participants, and supporters for all these years.

Neither did we imagine that so many years later we would still be working on some of the same issues that concerned us decades ago. Poverty, homelessness, and the wealth gap are at indefensible levels in this prosperous land. Pollution and climate change now threaten the very existence of life on this planet. Women's health and bodies are still at risk. Sexual harassment and assault are as prevalent as ever, and abortion, which had been legal since 1973, is now being criminalized in some states.

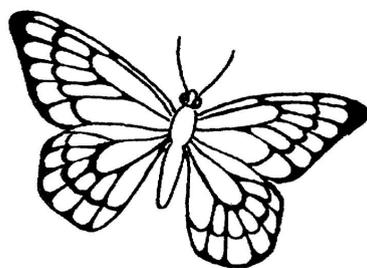
For our 2022 RCWMS Essay Contest we chose the theme of "Bodily Autonomy" and called on writers to focus on their own experience or on someone who spoke out for bodily integrity. Danyelle O'Hara, Julia Scatliff O'Grady, and Marya McNeish served as the contest judges and said the submitted essays were rich and unique.

First place goes to Liddy Grantland for "Everything I Can." You can read her essay in these pages. Second place to Allison Kirkland for "Bodily Autonomy." The third place winner is Jeri Dunman for "Marching Forward," and honorable mention goes to Heather Williams for "Named." Many thanks to all who entered. Please, keep writing and consider entering next year.

We are excited to welcome three new Anita McLeod interns to RCWMS this fall: Kaley Casenhiser, Destiny Hemphill, and Callie Swaim-Fox. Kaley is a graduate student at Yale working on a joint master's degree in the Divinity School and the School of the Environment. Destiny is a Duke graduate with an MFA in creative writing who will also be teaching at UNC. Callie, a recent graduate of Smith College, will be splitting her time between RCWMS and the Pauli Murray Center for History and Social Justice. Kaley will be with us for the fall, Destiny in the spring, and Callie will be with us all year.

We are ever grateful to Mike McLeod for creating the Anita McLeod internship in memory of his beloved wife, Anita. As an RCWMS board member and colleague, she built our elder women and end of life programs. Because she was particularly interested in conversations across generations, we make sure to provide the interns with intergenerational experiences.

In the years to come, we'll continue to learn from younger generations and keep on weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world.



## Everything

by Liddy Grantland

I talk to my body like a person because she is one.

Sometimes I talk to her like I would a colleague, passing in the hallway. *You doing alright?* Good, good to hear. Sometimes we're best friends, with long-running inside jokes. Ha! *Remember what happened last time you bought eggplant—even you couldn't eat what became of that adventure....* Sometimes we're like old lovers, bickering. *Oh come on, you forgot to take your vitamin? Again?* Other times we're like new lovers, giggling, falling more in love with each other and with the world every minute. *Oh yes, I think we are most certainly ordering both desserts.*

Right after a man follows me on my morning run and I run away, blood pounding in my ears, I hold her and talk to her like she's my daughter. Precious and breakable and tiny in my arms.

*Oh, my love. I will do everything I possibly can to keep you safe. Everything I can.*

Only we both know that I can do everything I can and still not be able to save us.

That night, sweat drips down my lower back into my waistband, down my forehead, through my face shield, into my eyes. I work as a caregiver in a beloved community of adults with and without disabilities. Here, we dance and create and argue and cook and forgive and clean up and celebrate and grieve—disabled, temporarily-able, somewhere-in-between bodies, all together, needed, loved.

Covid gave my dear friend, one of the most vital people in our home, the scariest cough I have ever heard. Barking and gurgly and unyielding.

I brace myself on either side of him, ready to help him transfer to another seat. He's quiet, eyes closed, breathing hard like he's gathering courage, or dozing off, or both.

He suddenly pulls me into a crinkly hug, my plastic gown against his soft t-shirt, my chest against his chest, my N-95 pressed into his shoulder. A voice in my head shouts, "Nope, too close!" But my body instinctively leans in, stroking his back.

"I love you," he says.

"I love you too," I say.

Twenty-eight months into the pandemic, twenty-six months into working and living in an intentional, vulnerable, intentionally-vulnerable community, I understand Covid fatigue well. Probably better than most.

But if these years have taught me anything, it's that our bodies are also bound in an invisible, infinite web of

(Continued inside.)

# Calendar

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

September 8, 2022, Thursday, 6:00–7:30 pm EDT  
ARTIST TALK & CLOSING EVENT for *Marine Debris is Ours*, an Exhibit by Bryant Holsenbeck  
Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke, Durham, NC

\*Sept. 13, 2022, Tues., 11:30 am–1:30 pm EDT (via Zoom)  
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women  
Meets monthly on the 2nd Tuesday.  
Contact: [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)

September 17, 2022, Saturday, 5:00–7:00 pm EDT  
SUE SNEDDON RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION:  
Opening Reception  
Craven Allen Gallery, Durham, NC  
The Gallery hosted artist Sue Sneddon (1953–2022) for 14 exhibitions over the course of 25 years. In this retrospective you will experience Sue's paintings once again in one of her favorite galleries. The show will remain on exhibit through October 29.

\*Sept. 21, 2022, (3rd Wednesdays), 7:00–8:30 pm EDT  
THE MINISTRY OF BLACK WOMEN'S SELF-CARE:  
A Series with Kim McCrae (via Zoom)  
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)

\*September 29, 2022, Thursday, 7:00 pm EDT (via Zoom)  
READING by Jeanette Stokes  
Jeanette will be reading from her new memoir *Making the Road As We Go* (RCWMS, 2022) about how she got to be a feminist in religion and developed RCWMS.  
Free and open to the public.  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*October 2, 2022, Sunday, 1:00–2:30 pm EDT  
OUR DISAPPEARING DARKNESS AND RECREATING PREHISTORIC NIGHT with MJ Sharp (via Zoom)  
In this virtual slideshow and discussion, MJ Sharp will present her photographic works-in-progress and discusses her attempts to recreate the experience of night at bronze-age megaliths. This work is part of her Fulbright Scholar Award to investigate what we lose when we lose natural night and darkness to light pollution.  
Leader: MJ Sharp is a Lecturing Fellow at Duke's Center for Documentary Studies. She spent a year in residence in Cornwall, England. More on MJ and her work: [www.mjsharp.com](http://www.mjsharp.com).  
Cost: \$10, \$25, or \$50. Proceeds to benefit RCWMS, in honor of our 45th anniversary year!  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*October 13 & 20, 2022, Thursdays, 7:00–8:30 pm EDT  
TREE SONGS: Braiding the Paths of the Labyrinth & the Celtic Tree Zodiac with Barrie Gibby (via Zoom)  
A two-session online labyrinth retreat. Barrie Gibby and Virginia Schenk will engage participants in a deeper understanding of the labyrinth by linking its quadrants and paths to life phases and the Celtic Tree Zodiac. In this two-part series, we gather as pilgrims to celebrate the beauty of your mystical Celtic birth tree and healing properties, identify your soul tree, and interweave the sacred feminine through the embodied spiritual practice of walking the labyrinth.



Illustration by Sue Sneddon

The experiences of journaling, sharing photos in a slide collage, honoring your Ogham (ancient Celtic alphabet) symbol, creating an altar, and singing with the trees (and Virginia) to unfold a new path given to us by the ancients. Resources sent in advance.  
Leaders: Barrie Carter Gibby is an educator, social justice activist, pianist, and theater director. She is a member of the Veriditas Faculty (Worldwide Labyrinth Project) and an Advanced Certified Labyrinth facilitator. Virginia Schenk is a vocal artist, social activist, arts advocate, music therapist, and Veriditas-trained labyrinth facilitator.  
Cost: \$60. Sessions will be recorded for those not available to attend both sessions.  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*October 14, 2022, Friday, 10:00–11:30 am EDT  
HISTORIC STAGVILLE TOUR  
5828 Old Oxford Highway, Durham, NC  
Tour will be mostly outdoors, with two short stops at historic buildings. Route includes uneven ground.  
Cost: \$10/person. Donations to Stagville are welcome.  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*October 23, 2022, Sunday, 2:00–4:00 pm EDT  
SURVIVE YOUR STORY: Expressive Writing for Release & Recovery with Shawna Ayoub (via Zoom)  
Difficult experiences can become lodged in our bodies in ways that impact us daily, and writing is a way to name, release, and even recover from those experiences. Expressive writing allows us to make sense and meaning, to recraft the struggle and better reflect our truth. It supports you in surviving your story. This course is in two parts. In the first part, we'll discuss the what and how of safe expressive writing practices followed by exercises and a take-home writing assignment. In the second part, you'll connect directly with your instructor, if you choose, to share your writing and schedule a one-on-one, confidential response and conversation about your writing goals.  
Leader: Shawna Ayoub is a brown, queer, Durham-based writer and instructor whose work prioritizes the engagement of difficult topics. For the last twelve years, she has offered courses independently and through the Center for Creative Writing. Her work has appeared in *Verywell Mind*, *Survivor Lit*, *Exit 7*, *[wherever]*, *The Archipelago*, and *The Manifest-Station*.  
Cost: \$100. For scholarships contact [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org).  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*Oct. 27–28, 2022, Thursday, 2:30 pm–Friday, 3:00 pm  
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival  
Trinity Ave. Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC  
This year we will sink our hands into the soil of the earth and our lives. As we highlight excellent preaching, hone our homiletic skills, and build community, we will excavate our life stories, those of the Bible, and those of the earth. Preachers and presenters include Rev. Dele, Rhody Mastin, Lisa Yebuah, Stephanie Workman, LaShauna Austria, and more! There will be workshops, meals, sermons, worship, and field trips. We plan to meet in person with masks and appropriate social distancing.  
Cost: \$25–85  
Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

\*November 3, 2022, Thursday, 7:00 pm EDT (via Zoom)  
SNEAK PEEK AUTHOR CHAT with Marjorie Hudson  
Join us for a preview of Marjorie Hudson's forthcoming novel *Indigo Fields*, a multi-generational drama that takes place in the South including a murder trial and a feud.  
Free. Register: [www.rcwms.org/events](http://www.rcwms.org/events)

(Continued on next page.)

# Everything...

interconnectedness, over which we have very limited control. Once some wise teachers taught me to see bodies as people, I could never see the world any other way. Our relationship held friendship, companionship, communion. Suddenly I was my body, and my body was me. Suddenly when my body was hungry, I didn't think about calorie labels or the MyPlate method; I just fed her. Suddenly when my body was sad, I didn't think about all the productive things I should be doing or how happy I really should be; I just treated her like I would anyone who was hurting.

If I had to sum it up, this is what you need to know, right now. You are your body, and your body is a person, and that person has valid wants and needs, fears and joys. Your well-being is wrapped up in your body's well-being, because you are one and the same. And my well-being is wrapped up in your well-being, because we are bodies sharing the same space and time on our planet, the planet that we are made of and which is made of us.

We are bodies and people at the same time. We are our own and connected at the same time.

It is with this heightened awareness that I watch the bodies of the people I love—older bodies, disabled bodies, already-dying bodies—be exactly the people that our culture has actively chosen not to protect. On purpose.

“Only really sick and really old people die from covid now, anyway.” Yes, they do. Do their lives matter less than yours? Are their bodies not worth living with? Do they get to make choices about their bodies, or just you?

For a moment while I'm hugging my friend, a scene flashes across my mind's eye. In it, I rip off my mask and face shield, gown and gloves, sweat drying in the bathroom fan. In it, I inhale my friend's Covid, like I'm giving the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation we practice in CPR training each year. In it, I'm sending all of the virus into my body, expunging it from his lungs and depositing it into mine. I realize that if it were that easy, I would do it in a heartbeat. Not because I am particularly brave or particularly wise, but because we belong with each other.

Oh my love, my body echoes back to me in that moment, echoes to my dear friend whose tired lungs are so very close to mine, echoes to all to the bodies around her, the ones that want to protect each other and even the ones that don't, because they are worthy of love, too: *I will do everything I possibly can to keep you safe. Everything I can.*

I know that I live in a body placed firmly in the year 2022, where the highest court in the land has reversed mine and so many people's right to autonomy over our bodies, where I am followed on my morning run by a man who could overpower my body in seconds if he chose to, where people are murdered everyday in the streets and in their schools and in their beds because our country gave people machines that can kill other people's bodies on purpose, where capitalist choices beyond my reach pollute the air and land and water that my body and my children's bodies and their children's bodies will need to survive.

(Continued next column.)



Illustration by Julia Ilana

I firmly believe that all of us deserve the freedom to make choices about our own bodies. And I firmly believe that the choices I make about my body change the way other bodies can breathe in the world.

My body, belonging fully to me and belonging fully to the earth, holds the wisdom that every body already holds. She knows that she can do everything she can and still not be able to save herself, save her friend, save anyone.

But all of our bodies know, deep down, that we have to hold each other, and to try.

*Liddy Grantland works in an intentional community that focuses on disability justice in the Washington, DC area. Her book, Flesh and Bones: Learning to Love This Body was published by RCWMS in 2021. She writes about bodies and all the ways they live in the world.*

# Calendar...

## ONGOING

Tuesdays, weekly, 11:30 am–12:30 pm EDT  
DEMOCRACY OUT LOUD: Weekly Protest Rally  
(Formerly Tuesdays with Tillis)  
Nonviolent community of resistance meets via Zoom.  
To register, email name to [jmwheele52@gmail.com](mailto:jmwheele52@gmail.com).

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

3rd Thursday, monthly, 7:00 pm EDT  
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*.  
Free. Info: [www.bhumisparsha.org/events](http://www.bhumisparsha.org/events)

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. \*All women, gender-nonconforming, trans, mixed-race and white-passing people of color welcome.  
Cost: \$50–300.  
Info and dates: [www.wearefindingfreedom.org](http://www.wearefindingfreedom.org)

SOLO WANDERINGS! Creative Retreats  
The Stable, private retreat in Durham, NC  
Day or overnight options  
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  
Weeks led by Jeanette Stokes: September 18–25, 2022, January 2–9, 2023, May 14–21, 2023  
Week led by Carol Henderson: May 8–14, 2023  
Info: contact Jeanette at [info@rcwms.org](mailto:info@rcwms.org)

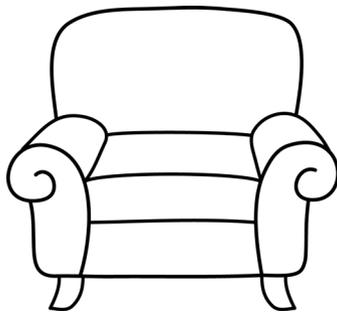
# Green Chair

by Marcy Litle

A while ago now I found myself in a period of aimlessness. Over the years I had been gradually whittling away at behaviors and choices that felt pasted on from the outside. This period of aimlessness came after a memorable exchange with my therapist during which I exclaimed something like, “you mean to tell me that some people wake up in the morning and just know what to do from the inside?” She smiled and said yes. I was flabbergasted. Until that moment I had spent my life trying to figure out what was expected of me and doing that. For example, when I married into a proper Pennsylvania family I found myself looking for clothes that would allow me to blend in—tasteful dresses, structured pants. And later when I got my first professional job I studied my boss’s wardrobe and tried to mimic it. I wasn’t aware of any of this at the time; I was just following what I thought I was supposed to do. Following in my mother’s footsteps in a way, even though she never finished college and I had an advanced degree. Once, this strong-willed woman told me that she thought she wasn’t allowed to have opinions of her own; she just followed cultural norms, her husband, the will of God, and fashion. She loved fashion, as in, “I hear skirts are going to be longer this year.”

So, when my foundation of shoulds crumbled beneath me during that period of aimlessness, I felt lost. I didn’t know what to do. Literally. I had never really learned how to listen to myself. So I decided to sit in a chair for a while to see what I could learn about myself and what I wanted. I resolved to sit there until I felt an impulse to act. Then to question the impulse. Are you real or are you just trying to fill up the time and make me less afraid? For several days I sat there for a couple of hours, trying to get up only when the impulse felt genuine. It was so long ago now that I don’t remember what I did. I probably made some tea. This was before iPhones, and iPads, and laptops so none of the impulses involved devices. I think this was helpful. Eventually I stopped sitting and went on with my life. A little bit more connected to myself.

I return to the practice from time to time when I feel lost, sometimes literally by repeating the practice and sometimes just as a reminder. The chair that I sat in was green, so now I just say to myself “this might be a green chair moment.” Not long ago I discovered that my friend Jeanette had a similar experience during a time of transition in



her life. She, too, practiced sitting in a chair waiting to discern what she actually wanted to do. (By coincidence, I suppose, her chair was also green.) She describes this experience in her upcoming book.

These past years, living through the pandemic and now with the possibility of returning to the world, I find myself again at a green chair moment. Some of the practices that I followed during the pandemic—obsessive news reading, lots of mysteries, crosswords, and a coloring app, among them—kept me company but mostly did not enrich my being. And they don’t seem adequate to the task ahead, whatever that may be. Right now I am sitting on a bed, gazing at the world outside my window, trying to find my green chair and myself.

*Before she retired, Marcy Litle taught history and international studies at Duke University. Since then she has enjoyed painting, reading, writing, and editing. Her book, Illusions of Innocence, about coming to terms with her experience of race in America, was published in 2020 by RCWMS. She now splits time between Durham and Seattle.*



RCWMS is a forty-five-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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