

South of the Garden

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

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September 2023

Fall

by Jeanette Stokes

Growing up on a farm in Illinois, my friend Mary became naturally attuned to the weather and now comments on it regularly. In late summer I often remember something she once told me. Mary's mother claimed there was always a break in the weather in early August coinciding with her (the mother's) birthday. Most years I watch for a break in the summer heat. It came early this year, in late July with a week of cooler temperatures and rain. Now in mid-August, it is beastly hot again, but because of that pleasant week I'm confident that the worst of it is over.

But these reliable patterns are becoming unreliable because of global warming. Summers in North Carolina seem hotter than when I moved here fifty years ago. Oklahoma and Texas, where I grew up, are hotter than when I was a child. It was plenty hot then, but not 100 degrees for months at a time. These changes are dangerous and lead us to wonder whether our planet and its life-forms will survive. Have we poisoned the earth and ourselves beyond repair?

The late summer bounty will turn to fall so quickly. As the farmers market fills with the tomato harvest and the leaves on the trees begin to dry, I notice that we are entering the period when the natural world begins to let go, heads toward dormancy, or dies.

Perhaps that is why I feel even more aware than usual of the people around me who are dealing with loss. My friend Sally lost her husband in the spring and is now living with grief. Another friend is recovering from cancer treatments. And our dear friend Mike McLeod is living through his last days.

Before his diagnosis RCWMS was already assisting Mike with the editing of a book. When he got the diagnosis, we decided to publish it as quickly as we could. Perhaps you have met Mike or heard about him. He's a retired doctor who was married to our beloved Anita McLeod for fifty-three years until her death in 2017. As they aged, they attended workshops and conferences, often together, to learn about conscious eldering. Anita built the RCWMS Elder Women program, which continues to this day. After she died, Mike went right on learning, teaching, and finally writing about aging.

Mike's book, *Coming Home to Yourself*, will be available in September. It is a wonderful collection of reflections and resources from a man who went from being a science oriented physician to being open to other modes of learning and teaching. Watch for an announcement in a few weeks.

Visiting Mike is not recommended at this point, but if you want to send a card or a message, be in touch with RCWMS and we can tell you how to reach out.

(Continued on back.)



Photo by J. Stokes

Bead by Bead

by Sarah Woodford

Note: Sarah Woodford of New Haven, CT, won first prize in the 2023 RCWMS Essay Contest. Enjoy her essay printed here.

The drawer moans, heavy with its own weight, as I pull it open. The musky smell of Avon perfume from the 1960s greets me as I look down at candy boxes from the 1950s and a large, green velvet grid of tiny boxes holding clip-on and screw-back earrings. A silk scarf from the 1930s lounges across it all.

On a late July day in 2021, after a languishing spring in hospice, my one-hundred-year-old grandmother died. A few days later, I stood in front of the sturdy walnut dresser in her and Grandpa's summer bedroom and opened it. Dad had tasked me with cleaning it out. I now have at least ninety years of jewelry in front of me. The decades of Grandma's life neatly stored in old candy boxes and earring compartments. There are my great-great-aunt's pearls and my great-grandmother's ruby pendant. There is the well-made costume jewelry from the 1950s that she painstakingly picked from our local department store. Here is the first watch she bought for herself in the 1940s.

Far in the back left corner, nestled in a round glass jewelry box, are three rosaries—one of white beads, one of blue beads, one of red. Grandma wasn't Catholic, but her best friend Ruth was. I remember visiting Ruth's tiny home in Barberton, Ohio, that was so pleasingly squat and square with green front steps. She had a floral chair by the big bay window and a plastic box that held many colors of round, opaque plastic beads and pliers and crucifixes. When she wasn't volunteering at church or watching her grandchildren, Ruth would make rosaries.

I pick up the rosary with the blue glass beads. They glitter in the artificial light of the bedroom as my fingers first press the crucifix and travel up and around the fifty-nine beads. Each bead a moment to reflect and pray. Each bead is connected to the next with delicate, silver loops, bent into place by Ruth's hands and needle-nose pliers.

Grandma told me she and Ruth met in their twenties at the Seiberling Rubber plant during World War II. The Allied forces needed both rubber goods—and workers—to survive and win the war. With most of Barberton's men across the Atlantic, rubber companies like Seiberling employed women to make life vests, life rafts, and bomber fuel tanks coated with a special, bullet-proof polymer paint. Working at Seiberling was Grandma's first job—and her first chance to have money to spend on herself after living through the poverty of the Great Depression. Not only did Seiberling give her a disposable income, it also gave her an opportunity to become friends with women who were different from her—women from different countries and faith traditions. As she was called to be a Rosie the Rubber Worker, she—a staunch Methodist—was also called into friendship with a Catholic woman.

(Continued inside.)

Calendar

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

Now through December 3, 2023
MANDY CARTER: The Scientist of Activism
Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, NC
Exhibit honors the long work of Mandy Carter, Durham, NC-based Black lesbian feminist activist, in the struggle for social justice, nonviolence, Black freedom movements, and queer liberation. Free and open to the public.

September 6–Oct. 4, 2023, 5 Wed., 6:00–8:30 pm EDT
FINDING FREEDOM: White Women* Taking on Our Own White Supremacy (via Zoom)
Online workshop that 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–\$345 (\$50 low income / students; \$192 break-even; \$345 cross-class solidarity ticket)
More: www.wearefindingfreedom.org/workshops

September 7, 2023, Thursday
HOLLY NEAR IN CONCERT
Community Church of Chapel Hill, 106 Purefoy Rd, Chapel Hill, NC
Cost: \$33 in person or \$20 livestream
Register: www.c3huu.org/swlconcerts.html

*September 9, 2023, Saturday, 2:00–4:00 pm EDT
WRITING THE BODY with Shawna Ayoub (via Zoom)
We store our emotional experiences in our physical bodies. On anniversaries of loss, for example, it is common to feel body pain, heaviness, or fatigue. In this workshop, we will practice feeling into our body stories safely in order to capture them in words. We will learn about how the body stores memory, and why, and take home practices for listening to the stories our bodies want to tell us. Writers will take home a packet of examples as well as prompts, and can contact Shawna for written feedback within two weeks of this workshop.
Leader: Shawna Ayoub is a brown, queer, Durham-based writer and instructor whose work prioritizes the engagement of difficult topics. After recognizing the personal benefits of writing for release and recovery, she has made her practice public for the last 12 years. Her work has appeared in numerous publications.
Cost: \$100 or \$75. Scholarships available.
More: info@rcwms.org. Register: www.rcwms.org/events

September 12, 19, 26, & Oct. 10, 17 (Tuesdays) 6–7:00 pm or Sept, 13, 20, 27 & Oct. 4, 11 (Wednesdays) 10–11:00 am
AWARENESS THROUGH MOVEMENT®: Enjoying Your Kinesthetic Sensibilities (via Zoom)
Leader: Betty Wolfe, GCFP®
Fee: \$15/lesson or \$60 for all five
Contact: bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com

*September 17–24, 2023
WEEK OF QUIET AND WRITING for Women
Trinity Center, Salter Path, NC
Wouldn't you like a whole week of quiet days to think and write? Come spend a week of quiet and writing with a supportive group of women at the beautiful Trinity Center. We observe silence in the daytime so participants can read, write, or rest. In the evenings we gather to reflect on the day and share our work with one another. Everyone gets their own room.
Cost: \$850, includes lodging and meals
Contact: jeanette@rcwms.org

(Continued next column.)



Roi and Roi/Shutterstock.com

*September 26, 2023, Tuesday, 11:30 am–1:30 pm EDT
ART OF CONSCIOUS AGING: A Group for Women (via Zoom)
Topic: The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F%#@
Leaders: Kay Stewart and Carolyn Maynard
Contact: RCWMS, info@rcwms.org.

*September 20, 2023, 7–8:30 pm EDT (3rd Wednesdays)
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.
September theme: *I Changed My Mind*
Leader: Kimberly (Gaubault) McCrae
Cost: \$10–\$40. Register: www.rcwms.org/events

September 21, TARA PRACTICE (Free & via Zoom)
Drawing from *Tara: The Liberating Power of the Female Buddha*, Rachael Wooten offers teachings and guided meditation. (3rd Thursdays)
Leader: Rachael Wooten, PhD, Jungian analyst, writer, and Tibetan Buddhist dharma teacher.
More: www.rachaelwootenauthor.com/practices

September 20–22, 2023, Wednesday–Friday
2023 FISHING DIFFERENTLY NATIONAL CONFERENCE
Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago, IL
The Oikos Institute for Social Impact will connect faith-inspired leaders and place-based investors to help anchor institutions such as faith communities and BIPOC organizations harness the power of their assets for communal transformation and economic mobility. Our asset-based approach to community development aims to accelerate the relief of distressed communities; alleviating human suffering; maximizing human capital; and solving social problems.
Cost: \$395 general; \$195 seminarians
More: www.oikosinstitute.org/fishing

September 30 & October 1, 2023, 1:30–3:30 pm (Saturday & Sunday) (via Zoom)
REST FULLNESS: A Sounder Sleep Sominar®
Irregular sleep patterns can cause problems with memory, mood, cardiovascular health, or immune system resilience. Thankfully, it is not necessary to suffer from any of these conditions due to poor sleep. Let Betty Wolfe help you learn to sleep.
Leader: Betty Wolfe, GCFPcm, Authorized Sounder Sleep System® Teacher
Cost: \$80 Early Bird before 9/27; \$95 after 9/27.
Contact: bettywolfe@lessonswithease.com

*October 5–6, 2023, Thursday–Friday
HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival
Trinity Ave. Presbyterian Church, Durham, NC
Theme: Repair, Release, Renew
Together we will explore the call to speak and act in broken places in our communities and world. We will highlight excellent preaching, hone our homiletic skills, and provide support for one another. There will be time for workshops, meals, sermons, and worship. In person with masks.
Leaders: Melva Sampson, Donna Banks, Dorothy Clark, Jereann King Johnson, Melinda Wiggins, and more.
Cost: \$25–100, more info: ncwomenpreaching.com
Register: www.rcwms.org/events

(Continued next column.)

Calendar...

October 11–November 8, 2023, (5 Wednesdays), 1:00–3:30 pm Eastern Time
SEEING THE FOREST: Reckoning with Our Roots for a Racially Just Future (via Zoom)
This anti-racist genealogy workshop for white people is a remedy for our collective amnesia, nostalgia and silence around race. We'll gather to reclaim our very human ancestors. We'll explore the ways we're connected to each other and the land we live on. How might we as white people learn from our history to make real change in the present? What kind of ancestors do we long to be in our dreams of the future?
*People of all gender expressions, and all mixed-race and white-presenting people of color, who are interested in exploring their ancestry through an anti-racist lens are welcome to join us. The category of "white" may not be exactly how you define yourself. This workshop may still be useful to you if you want to explore the white parts of your identity.
Cost: Free–\$525 (Free; \$125, solidarity rate; \$325, full rate; \$525, redistribution rate)
More: www.wearefindingfreedom.org/workshops

October 26–29, 2023, Thursday–Sunday
THRESHOLDS AS INVITATIONS
Avila Retreat Center, Durham, NC
Experience the distinctly Quaker manner of solitude in community. Spiritual thresholds, as Joyce Rupp says, "mark the division between who we are now and who we will become, between the present awareness of the Holy One and how this relationship develops in the future." Come explore contemplative practices that can make thresholds more welcome invitations. There will be silent time for prayer and reflection, walks among the trees, and contemplative interaction with scripture.
Leaders: April Allison, Jan Blodgett, & Scott Wagoner.
Cost: \$250–525, (depends on housing choices)
More: www.schoolofthespirit.org/contemplative-retreats/north-carolina-retreat

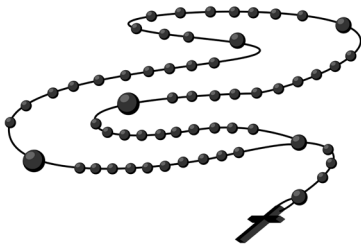
*November 9, 2023, 7:00 pm
THE PHILADELPHIA ELEVEN: A Screening
St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Durham, NC
In defiance of church rules and two millennia of patriarchal Christianity, in 1974 a group of women and their supporters organize their ordination to become Episcopal priests. The ordinations took place at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia and inspired a media frenzy. In this film, you will meet the women who succeed in transforming an age-old institution.
Free and open to the public. Reservations required.

*WEEKS OF QUIET & WRITING
January 2–9, 2024 (Tues.–Tues.) led by Jeanette Stokes;
May 6–12, 2024 (Mon.–Sun.) led by Carol Henderson;
May 12–19, 2024 (Sun.–Sun.) led by Jeanette Stokes;
September 22–29, 2024 (Sun.–Sun.)
Info: contact Jeanette at info@rcwms.org

ONGOING

Tuesdays, 11:30 am–12:30 pm EDT (via Zoom)
DEMOCRACY OUT LOUD: Weekly Protest Rally
This nonviolent community of resistance (Formerly Tuesdays with Tillis) has gathered since 2017 for education, support, and action. All are welcome.
To register, email name to jmwhee52@gmail.com.

Wednesdays, weekly, 5:30–6:30 & 7–8:00 pm EDT
MUSIC: takeOut jazz with mahaloJazz!
The Eddy, Saxapahaw, NC



Roi and Roi/Shutterstock.com

Bead...

After they met in the 1940s, Ruth and Grandma were constant parts of each other's lives. As a little girl, I remember the quiet rhythm of their life together: visits to each other's homes, showers of cards for every occasion, and an angel food cake iced with pineapple whip cream frosting baked by Ruth every November for Grandma's birthday. They often would sit in the back room of Grandma's house, grandma in her chair and Ruth beside her on the couch. Gossiping and laughing they would share stories and watch the trees in Grandma's apple orchard sway in the breeze. Sometimes, Ruth would bring her rosary work with her, and as they talked and looked out the window, she would connect beads.

I rub my eyes. How long have I been at this? I feel so tired, not only from grief, but also from the overstimulation of being in the presence of a century's worth of artifacts. So many memories are contained in this drawer, some I shall be able to carry away from this jewelry drawer, away from this house and out of the state of Ohio, but many more were lost with Grandma's death. The pieces I don't take with me will go into an estate sale and on to other lives. I step out into the bright July sun to clear my head and take a walk in her backyard. I walk up the hill to the apple orchard. The trees are over ninety years old now and yet their toughened, twisted branches reach out to the sky with lush fans of green. Under their leaves they are forming small green spheres of fruit that will grow and ripen in the fall, one of life's many rhythms. As I walk, I reach into my right pocket and my hand touches something. I wrap my fingers around one of Ruth's rosaries. Its beads slowly glide between my right index finger and thumb, I am not Catholic, but a few of my closest friends are, and I know the prayer of the rosary well—"Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Pray for us now and at the hour of our death."

Both Grandma and Ruth are dead. Yet here in my right hand is the physical proof of their devotion to each other. Grandma happily received the rosaries that Ruth made for her over the years. She knew they were extensions of the soul of her friend. This rosary in my pocket will come with me back to Connecticut and find a new home in my office drawer. I shall pull it out and pray it on stressful days, on joyful days, on days when I don't know where to start, or I don't know how to end, each time bringing Ruth's creativity—and an important friendship—into the daily rhythms of my own life.

I turn around and look back at the house. I see the bay window. My Grandma's chair and the couch next to it are empty, but I can still see her and Ruth, sitting side-by-side and chatting with each other—their gossip and giggles sanctifying the moment and the view.

My Catholic friends love the tangibility of a holy object—a relic, a statue, even a rosary can move you into a different space and time. The past becomes present and what is only held through memory is once more gained. I am not alone on this walk. Bead by bead, Ruth and Grandma touch my hand as the rosary lightly slips through my fingers. And as I ask Mary to pray for me, I also pray them.

Sarah Woodford (she/her) is a writer, Episcopalian, and cat lady. She lives in New Haven, CT.

Notes

RCWMS turned forty-six years old on August 17. It is hard to believe that this effort to weave feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world has continued for all that time. We at the Resource Center are so grateful to all our participants, donors, and friends for joining in this work. Together we have created community and helped any number of women to pursue their dreams.

Our artist in residence, Kimberley Pierce Cartwright, had just such a dream. When she began her two-year residency with us in early 2022, she said she wanted to host a conference for African American quilters. We said, "Let's do it." And we did. Our Kindred Spirits conference hosted four teachers from around the country and fifty participants. The accompanying quilt show, organized around the theme of "Deconstructing the Mammy Archetype" was open to the public for just one Friday evening and attracted 450 people. You can see some images of the conference and the exhibition on the web. Write to info@rcwms.org for a link.

Filmmaker Sekiya Dorsett came from New York to document Kindred Spirits, focusing on Jereann King Johnson, a long-time educator, organizer, and quilter who lives in Warrenton, NC. RCWMS is working with Courtney Reid-Eaton and Black Feminist Film School on this documentary about Jereann.

Mark your calendar for this year's HOMEGROWN: NC Women's Preaching Festival, October 5 and 6 in Durham. This year's theme is "Repair, Release, Renew." Leaders include Melva Sampson, Donna Banks, Dorothy Clark, Jereann King Johnson, Melinda Wiggins, and more.

Life is a Song of Love: A Woman's Spiritual Journey of the Heart and Womb by my life-long friend Sally Patton will be published on November first and is available for preorder on Amazon. (We don't love Amazon, but that's the way to get Sally's book.) In the book Sally weaves together strands from wisdom teachings, her own spiritual path, many years of healing work, and stories from her life to form a sturdy thread. When the thread is followed, it can lead the reader through a landscape of patriarchal wounds and broken relationships to a place of insight, restoration, and hope. Sally provides insights into relationships between mothers and daughters, demonstrating the difficulties caused by patriarchal conditioning. She shares her own pain and self- acceptance in ways that increase the possibilities for forgiveness and repair in the lives of others. Let her accompany you on your quest for deeper understanding and peace. More info about the book: sally@embracechildspirit.org.

Fall

The following is an excerpt from "For Those Who Have Far to Travel," *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* by Jan Richardson and is quoted in Mike McLeod's *Coming Home to Yourself*.

A BLESSING FOR EPIPHANY

If you could see
the journey whole
you might never
undertake it;
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.

Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping
step by
single step.

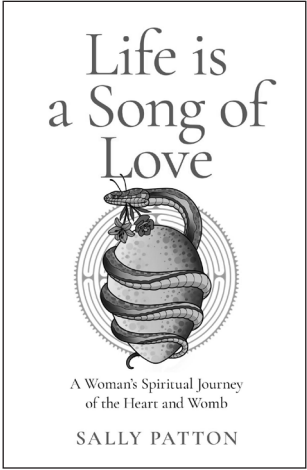


RCWMS is a forty-six-year-old nonprofit dedicated to weaving feminism and spirituality into a vision of justice for the world. RCWMS sponsors workshops, conferences, and retreats on women, religion, creativity, spirituality, and social justice. The organization mentors and encourages young women, religious 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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Cover image
by Tyler Grenzeback



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