

RCWMS Elder Women Project

This RCWMS Elder Women Project document is divided into three parts: Past Programs, Leaders, and Resources (books, films, etc.). Questions? Please email info@rcwms.org.

Part I — Past Programs

The RCWMS Elder Women Project has sponsored a variety of programs, workshops, and retreats. Here are the previous Elder Women programs, the majority of which ended in 2019 after the death of project founder Anita McLeod in 2017. The Art of Conscious Aging group continues to meet monthly. Check [here](#) for upcoming RCWMS events.

2019

What Will You Do With the Rest of Your Life?

As we age, our priorities often change, we become more discerning, we seek ways we can be more authentically ourselves. This daylong retreat will offer time to reflect on who and where we have been as women and the opportunities that open to us as we age.

Leaders: Pat Boswell and Terry Moore-Painter

Get Your Best Night's Sleep Ever! A Sounder Sleep System® Workshop

Learn to work with the wisdom and rhythms of your own living, breathing body to create more peaceful awake time, a more pleasurable approach to sleep, and more restful and restorative sleep.

Leader: Betty Wolfe

The Art of Conscious Aging: An Ongoing Group

This group met on the second Tuesday of the month, from 11:30 am–2:00 pm at the Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC.

2018

The Art of the Condolence Note

Workshop will include a discussion of what makes a note successful as well as some practical do's and don'ts. Each participant will practice writing a note and leave knowing how to tackle this difficult task.

Leader: Carol Henderson

2017*Being Mortal: Workshop Series*

This series focuses on Atul Gawande's book *Being Mortal* and incorporates exercises to help us understand aging, dying, and death as personal and social concerns. One aim of the workshop is to embrace the reality of mortality in order to live with it more consciously and richly.

Leader: Jehanne Geith

The Art of Conscious Aging: An Ongoing Group

The second Tuesday of each month, 11:30 am–2:00 pm

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

2016*Befriending Death*

January, February, March 2016 (3 Sunday afternoons)

This series invites participants to contemplate death, consider practices that might help them be present to themselves and others in the experience of dying, and reflect on ways to deepen their appreciation of life.

Leaders: Betsy Barton, Jehanne Geith, Stacy Grove and Anita McLeod

The Art of Conscious Aging: An Ongoing Group

The second Tuesday of each month, 11:30 am–2:00 pm

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

2015*The Art of Conscious Aging: An Ongoing Group*

The second Tuesday of each month, 11:30 am–2:00 pm

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

Turning Points: Intergenerational Writing Workshop

Fall 2015 (4 sessions)

Together we will explore life turning points, using writing as a spiritual and self-revelatory practice. We will reflect on ancient images of the Maiden/Mother/Crone archetype, while also finding new ways of envisioning our unique and universal spiraling journeys through life.

Leaders: Anita McLeod and Rebecca Welper

Heron's Walk On Water's Edge: A Retreat

October 2015 (7:00 pm on Thursday–3:00 pm on Sunday)

The restorative effects of spending intentional time outdoors in community are well researched and documented. Herons Walk will offer contemplative, mindful, and ceremonial practices in the natural world. During this intergenerational retreat, we will return to a natural pace, utilizing wisdom rooted in intuition, imagination, and bodily sensations. Through soul circles and eco-contemplative practices, we open to the most relevant reciprocal healing medicine of our time, intimate relationship with the natural world.

Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod

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Leaders: Betsy Barton, Stacy Grove, Anita McLeod, and Jocelyn Streid

2014

The Art of Conscious Aging: An Ongoing Group

The second Tuesday of each month, 11:30 am–2:00 pm

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

Herons Walk On Water's Edge: A Retreat

October 2014 (7:00 pm on Thursday–3:00 pm on Sunday)

The restorative effects of spending intentional time outdoors in community are well researched and documented. Herons Walk will offer contemplative, mindful, and ceremonial practices in the natural world. During this intergenerational retreat, we will return to a natural pace, utilizing wisdom rooted in intuition, imagination, and bodily sensations. Through soul circles and eco-contemplative practices, we open to the most relevant reciprocal healing medicine of our time, intimate relationship with the natural world.

Leaders: Sherylyn Pitt and Anita McLeod

Consider the Conversation: Film & Discussion on End-Of-Life Issues

April 16, 2014

Durham County Main Library

When Grandmothers Speak, The Earth Will Heal (from a Hopi saying)

Tuesday, April 8, 2014, 9:30 am–4:00 pm

Timerlake Farm, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro)

Inspired by the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers, this retreat explores ways to bridge the separation between humans and the natural world. Will include meditation, shared stories, and silent walks on wooded trails. Please bring a bag lunch.

Leaders: Carolyn Toben, founder of the Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm Earth Sanctuary, and Anita McLeod, director of RCWMS Elder Women Project.

2013

Harvesting Our Stories: Collecting Our Wisdom

November 9, 2013

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

The autumn of our lives is the time for harvesting the wisdom of our lives. As we enter our later years, it is important to unearth and gather up our life stories, to share them with others, to reflect on what we have learned by experience, and to discern how we might want to pass on our wisdom. This workshop is designed for women 55 and older. As a follow-up, we will offer an optional monthly morning writing circle for those who attend the workshop and who would like to continue to harvest their stories.

Leaders: Anita McLeod and Liz Dowling-Sendor

Women & Money

October 27, 2013

Durham, NC

Everyone has a personal money journey. What confusing messages did you receive in childhood about money? Do you harbor feelings around such issues as abundance, scarcity, earning, investing, spending and giving? How do these messages and feelings intersect with your core values and/or spiritual beliefs? Join a circle of women as we explore ways to align our financial actions with our values.

Leaders: Lisa Gabriel, financial planner, and Anita McLeod, Director of Elder Women Project at RCWMS

Consider the Conversation: Film & Discussion

September 22, 2013, 1:00 pm

Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, NC

The Art of Aging: Celebrating Elderhood

Saturday, September 7, 2013, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Colony Hills Clubhouse, 3060 Colony Road, Durham, NC

Join a circle of women as we explore our experience of aging and discover ways to embrace the opportunities and challenges of this rich time of life. Contemplate awakening to the adventure of conscious aging and the many possible gifts of enlivenment.

Leaders: Lyndall Hare, PhD gerontologist, and Anita McLeod, Director of the RCWMS Elder Women Project

Our Nature, In Nature: A Women's Retreat

April 19–21, 2013

Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro)

In the Spring, we are called to be outside, relishing earth's warm winds, colorful blooms, and blue skies. The natural world, mirror of our own nature, invites us to nurture, empower, and transform ourselves. Indigenous cultures knew the sacredness of the natural world, its seasons, and its compass directions. Together we will explore the wisdom of each direction as it pertains to our current life situations. As we establish a safe community together for this weekend, we will spend time in Council practice and alone time on the land to experience its messages for us. Camping is an option. Elder women and younger women will learn from and inspire one another. Leaders: Pat Webster, clinical psychologist in private practice in Durham and New Bern, NC, and Anita McLeod, Director of Elder Women Project at RCWMS.

End of Life Series

January 27, February 10, February 24, March 10, & March 17, 2013

Durham, NC in a comfortable private home with a cat

This multi-part series offers resources, information, and exploration of issues facing all of us as we prepare for the end of our life. Join a circle of courageous women willing to explore what a "good death" might mean and how preparing for it opens us to wholeheartedly embrace the precious life that awaits us.

Leaders: Anita McLeod, Director of Elder Women Project at RCWMS; Betsy Barton, MPH, Duke Medical Center; Carolyn H. Burrus, M.Div., Hospice Chaplain and Bereavement Counselor; Sharon Thompson, attorney; Lisa Gabriel, financial planner; and Anne Watson Davis, attorney.

Reaching Your Future With Ease

January 12, 2013

55 Vilcom Center Drive, 2nd Floor Studio, Chapel Hill, NC

How often we heard from our own family elders that "getting old is not for sissies." The Feldenkrais Method® offers this affirming idea: "Improve movement, improve life!" Join Betty Wolfe, GCFPcm, for an afternoon of Awareness Through Movement® lessons designed to enlarge the possibilities for safety and comfort in living your unique future, however far that reaches. Mats and blankets will be provided as these lessons are taught on the floor. You should

be able to get up and down with minimal assistance. There will be time for breaks as well as refreshments and reflections.

Leader: Betty Wolfe, M. Div. is a Board Certified biofeedback practitioner. Within her business, Lessons with Ease, she offers integrative and personalized learning opportunities to help with pain and stress related issues.

2012

A Day of Quiet

December 1, 2012

The King's Daughters Inn, Durham, NC

The gentle gifts of winter can be lost in the frantic swirl of the holiday season. Instead of being a time of quiet reflection, December can become a time of disconnection from ourselves and from the earth. Periods of silence and solitude may help us notice the diminished light and appreciate the beauty of a world laid bare for a time. Drawing inward and being quiet may help us truly connect in community. Join us for a time of remembering our tender yearnings for peace, hope, love and joy. Together we will explore ways of deepening our connection to the sacred by opening our breathing and meditation. The afternoon will include silent time together, an exploration of lovingkindness, walking softly outside, and a simple art reflection. No meditation experience required.

Leaders: Barbara Anderson teaches African Studies at UNC and Anita McLeod is Director of Elder Women Project at RCWMS.

Reading by Carolyn Toben from her book, Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry

November 27, 2012

Durham, NC

Toben spent many hours over ten years with renowned priest, author, and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, engaged in deep discussions about his foundational thinking on the human-earth-divine relationship.

Giving Thanks to the Earth

October 27, 2012

New Hope Camp & Conference Center, Chapel Hill, NC

We are living in a perilous time: our water, soil, air and all living beings on earth are in jeopardy. Many people are trapped in despair and inaction, but despair is not the only option. Come join with others who want to find another way. Tap into your creative imagination and experience an introduction to Joanna Macy's vision of "Active Hope" in a beautiful natural setting. Join us as we enliven our connection to the natural world, express our gratitude to mother earth, resonate with her suffering, and consider how we can support her. We'll engage in personal writing,

conversation, simple drawing, and basic movement to live music. Together we will create a community of creative expression that will inspire us to help heal and protect the earth. Previous experience or skill in movement or drawing is not expected or needed.

Leader: Ann Simon Koppelman, PsyD, is a semi-retired clinical psychologist in Chapel Hill, NC.

When Grandmothers Speak, The Earth Will Heal

September 22, 2012

Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, Whitsett, NC (near Greensboro)

It has been well said that in today's technological world, grandmothers have a special role to fulfill in sharing their love of the natural world with succeeding generations. Come and enjoy a quiet day spent at nature's pace surrounded by beauty and learn some special ways of sharing a love of the earth with grandchildren and all children.

Leaders: Carolyn Toben and Anita Mcleod

Harvesting Our Stories: Collecting Our Wisdom

September 8, 2012

The autumn of our lives is the time for harvesting the wisdom of our lives. As we enter our later years, it is important to unearth and gather up our life stories, to share them with others, to reflect on what we have learned by experience, and to discern how we might want to pass on our wisdom. This workshop is designed for women 55 and older. As a follow-up, we will offer an optional monthly morning writing circle for those who attend the workshop and who would like to continue to harvest their stories.

Leaders: Anita McLeod and Liz Dowling-Sendor

Theory and Practice of the Work that Reconnects: A 10-Day Residential Intensive with Joanna Macy on Deep Ecology

May 25–June 3, 2012

Stone Circles at the Stone House, Mebane, NC

Bring forth fresh vision, courage and creativity in this time of planetary crisis.

Leader: Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, PhD, is a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology.

Legacy Planning for Women

April 29, 2012

Durham, NC, in a lovely home with a cat

There comes a time in your life when you long to know that your life somehow has purpose. You seek to leave a meaningful mark on the world. Legacy Planning can help you discover ways to use the resources and experiences you've accumulated in life to make a lasting impression on those you love and the causes you believe in.

Leader: Lisa Gabriel is a certified financial planner who has over 25 years of financial services experience designing integrated, strategic solutions for individuals, families, and institutions.

Part II — Leaders

Anita McLeod (1939–2017) first became interested in elder issues while attending workshops on menopause. She was frustrated that presenters so often described aging as a process of “disintegration and deterioration.” “I’m not disintegrating! I feel better than I’ve ever felt in my life!” she says. In response, she decided to bring women together to talk about their personal experiences of menopause. After leading workshops on menopause for a decade, she turned her attention to the next stage of life, elderhood. Using her background in nursing and health promotion, and her training in workshop facilitation, Anita began to develop RCWMS’s Elder Women Program. She grounds this work in teachings she absorbed during a Vision Quest with the School of Lost Borders. There she learned to value the wisdom of elders and the gifts they have to bring to their communities.

Anita has designed the Elder Women Program to focus on consciousness raising and to offer an alternative to our culture’s habitual perspective on aging. She describes her work as helping women to embrace their elder years as “a time of deepening, of growth and continued learning, a time to look back on life and to pass along what has been learned.” In her work with elder women she has found that they are hungry to share their stories. “It’s not about information. They are hungry for deep community, where they can hear each other’s stories.” In her elder years, Anita has rediscovered a sense of the sacred in nature, which has become a great source of nourishment and grounding for her. She finds life being out in nature—sailing, camping, or hiking. Anita also loves gathering women in circles to share or sit in silence. “There is a presence in the center that is palpable to me.” The sense of connection and oneness that she has discovered in nature and in the circle form the core of her work with other elder women.

“It’s women’s willingness to speak and share at a very deep level, their willingness to be vulnerable and courageous that moves me. “It’s such a gift and a privilege to be part of that.”

Betsy Barton has long been interested in “educating vulnerable populations about unpopular health topics.” She has been a part of the social justice community since she was young, working on issues such as education for those living with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. These concerns led her to pursue a Master in Public Health from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. But it was not until she became the main caregiver and advocate for her sister in her journey to death that Betsy understood end of life care as her particular vocation.

After her sister's passing, Betsy accepted a job at the Institute for Care at the End of Life at Duke Divinity School. This enabled her to delve deeply into end of life issues. During this time, she developed a workshop series based on the Institute's toolkit, "The Unbroken Circle." The toolkit aims to help congregations develop support networks for those facing illness, end of life, and grief. Betsy's accompanying four-part workshop is offered around the country, including by Project Compassion in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Death and dying is like childbirth, she says, "no one can tell you how to do it." This mystery is part of what draws Betsy to these issues. "What I really love about this work is that it is very individual. It is individual for each person and at each particular moment."

Betsy has served as a panelist in the End of Life Series offered by the RCWMS Elder Women Program. She challenges workshop participants to understand end of life issues beyond medical scenarios and concerns, and instead encourages them to use their reflections on death and dying to focus on how they can live more fruitfully now.

Betsy has participated in an intensive yearlong program, "Heavenly Messengers: Awakening through Illness, Aging and Death." The program is based on Buddhist teachings and hosted by Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Woodacre, CA.

"Death is what makes life interesting," she says, "this work has deepened and focused my spiritual life, and increased my sense of gratitude exponentially."

Betty Wolfe finds joy in movement and the body's intuitive ways of knowing. Her work is about returning this joy to her clients. After working as a certified biofeedback practitioner for nearly thirty years, Betty found that the Feldenkrais Method could offer additional tools for people to learn about their bodies and become independent in their care. She became a certified Feldenkrais instructor in 2006. Through her private practice, Lessons with Ease, Betty offers Awareness Through Movement (ATM) sessions and biofeedback services.

Betty describes Feldenkrais work as functionally oriented, "it's about how you organize yourself to lift something, or to go upstairs, or to get in the car, or to garden, because these are all the times that we end up hurting ourselves and then patterns perpetuate." ATM sessions, part of the Feldenkrais Method, offer a unique opportunity to mindfully engage with the body. She describes each class as a kind of "individual research lesson," which presents participants with movement puzzles. Participants are asked to pay attention to how they respond to these challenges—both physically and emotionally. "There are so many layers of learning in doing a lesson like this." The goal is for participants to learn how their bodies can integrate movement that "is easy, and enjoyable, and safe. And you are not waiting for pain to tell you that you've done something wrong."

Betty has taught the “Reaching Your Future with Ease” workshop through the RCWMS Elder Women Program. The three-hour workshop encourages participants to be mindful of how they perform reaching movements and whether these may be perpetuating pain. “For aging women, the joy of these lessons is to begin to experience these new ways of moving.”

Carolyn Toben describes herself as a messenger, carrying the message “to come home to ourselves.” Carolyn’s deep relationship with the earth and its wisdom has long been a part of her life, particularly as she has cared for and learned from her land at the Timberlake Earth Sanctuary. This 165-acre refuge, located near Greensboro, NC, brims with wide wildflower meadows, pine forests, ponds, and creeks. It is laced with trails, which invite visitors to immerse themselves in the land. Carolyn’s long-time friendship with Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and ecotheologian, further encouraged her trust in the land as teacher. She has written about their friendship in her book *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*. She continues to share the richness of Berry’s writings and thoughts with others through workshops she leads at Timberlake.

Carolyn believes that only when we learn to truly love the earth will we find our way out of the environmental crisis. In 2000, she founded The Center for Education, Imagination, and the Natural World, dedicated to helping children learn to cherish and live in communion with the earth. Originally housed at Timberlake, the Center has now moved to Greensboro, NC, though many of its events still take place at Timberlake so the peace and beauty of the land can be a part of program experiences.

Carolyn shares Timberlake with RCWMS when she leads the “When Grandmothers Speak, The Earth Will Heal” Workshop for the Elder Women Project. The workshop was born of her intense desire for women to live into their unique role as caretakers of the earth by passing on their wisdom and love of the natural world to their grandchildren, and all children. In this way, the workshop fits into her mission to help children grow in their knowledge of the earth. During the workshop women are encouraged to remember what they know about and have lived in their relationship with the earth. They go on an “earth walk” with guides from the Center’s children’s programs and experience nature through various activities they can share with the children in their lives. During the workshop participants are encouraged to write prayers. Inspired by this practice, Carolyn is working on a book of prayers from grandmothers to grandchildren.

Lyndall Hare lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, but her interest in working with elders began during childhood in South Africa where her parents ran a nursing home. She recalls spending hours there, listening to residents’ stories. “It became a delightful place to visit as it gave me an audience with undivided attention.” Later, studying social work in university, Lyndall began to understand herself as an activist for the elderly, advocating for those who are silenced when shunted into nursing homes or assisted living facilities. “We as a society in the US don’t do a

great job of incorporating our elders into our community,” she says, and calls this a great loss. Elders need to be heard in our communities, their wisdom needs to be shared. Lyndall sees conscious aging as a movement to bring these voices back into the world.

A spiritual perspective permeates Lyndall’s work on conscious aging. She works as an eldercare coach for adults who find themselves taking care of aging parents. In this role, she focuses on the spiritual needs of both caretakers and their parents, using Jungian Archetypes to enrich understandings of challenging situations and changing relationships. Lyndall also works through the Respite Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, to host workshops about conscious aging, such as “Entering Crone-hood—a Rite of Passage,” and “Conversations about Positive Aging.” These workshops help participants understand aging not as decline, but as growth into deeper wisdom and an opportunity to act as mentors and wisdom keepers in our world.

Lyndall has led The Art of Aging workshop for the RCWMS Elder Women Program. She uses imagery, writing, guided meditations, contemplative practices, and stories to enrich participants’ experience and stimulate conversation. “I’ve personally learned that there is a hunger for these conversations. I am just a creator of the space.”

“My own aging has become a rite of passage into a more spiritual life with more contemplative practice,” she says, bringing her “a deepening and peacefulness which I didn’t expect.”

Pat Webster has a private psychotherapy practice in Durham and in Oriental, NC. After completing a degree in nursing, Pat received her doctorate in clinical psychology, focusing on the intersection between spirituality and psychology. In an effort to bridge these worlds she attended the Mystery School with Dr. Jean Houston where she learned about the mystical traditions of the world’s religions. “This was one of the greatest gifts of my life,” she says. She was particularly drawn to traditions that focused on nature as a teacher, such as Native American spirituality. “There’s something that happens in nature, where nature turns into the teacher. For me in my own personal growth and experience, this deepens the work that gets done.” Pat has continued to explore Native American spirituality in her personal life and practice and has taken several vision quests.

After an intensive vision quest experience with The School of Lost Borders, Pat felt “bursting with energy and a desire to serve and share” the depth and richness that Native American spirituality has brought to her life. “Native Americans have this saying, ‘for all my people.’ We don’t just go do this as some lone, solo journey . . . the gifts that are given to us need to be for our tribe.” After Pat shared this desire with Anita Macleod, Anita invited her to lead a workshop for the RCWMS Elder Women Program.

This invitation turned into the “Our Nature, In Nature” workshop. Though the workshop does not offer a vision quest per se, Pat calls it a series of mini vision quests based on the Native American Four Shields teachings. Workshop participants turn to nature as teacher and guide, spending time together on the land at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary near Greensboro, NC. For Pat, the workshop has reaffirmed the depth and wisdom elders have to share, and through it she feels she has found another part of her tribe.

Pat believes that our culture tries to scare our elders and shut them up, when an important task of elderhood is to speak. “It is not good for us to shut up, it is not good for us to live in fear. It is good for us to live our energy the way we have it... Our task is to hand on our wisdom, and make our life experience something that can be used in carrying on life as we prepare to leave it.”

For the Rev. **Liz Dowling-Sendor**, writing is sacred. She finds the Holy Spirit calling us to ourselves as we put words on a page.

While raising her children, Liz worked as a freelance writer and editor, writing for newspapers, magazines, and textbooks. In her elder years, her love of writing has only grown. “As I’ve gotten older, I realize that I’ve lived through so many things, and I have a lot of stories to tell.” In the “Harvesting Our Stories” workshop, Liz inspires other elder women to discover the richness of their own lives through writing. She has found that elder women in particular often feel a great need to write. “There is this sense that you don’t have a lot of time left, coupled with the richness you’ve lived in your life, so you just want to tell your story. I think it’s a great impulse.”

She has found that though many women come to the workshop thinking they do not have much to share, they often discover they truly “have done amazing things, even just in their relationships with friends.” At the heart of the workshop is the joy participants experience when they “get to dig deeper into the soil of their lives and see what’s down there. We’re not trying to be Pulitzer Prize winners,” she says, “we’re just trying to speak our hearts.”

Beyond the richness of the stories shared, Liz feels a great sense of community growing among participants in the writing circles. The trust they exhibit when they share their stories is palpable. “It always feels like holy ground, that someone in this group has been brave enough to share one of their stories. It’s that incredible sense that they trust all of us when they read their writing to each other.” Beyond the workshop, participants are free to use their writing as they wish, to keep for themselves, share with families, or develop further.

Liz describes the experience of a writing circle as “powerful, and sacred, and holy. It’s really an experience of the holy.”

As a young woman, **Sharon Thompson** became interested in law as an effective tool for social change, especially in addressing issues of women's and gay rights. Today she continues to work in these areas at NicholsonPham Law Firm in Durham, North Carolina. She feels that educating people is an important part of her work and is glad that she has information that can be useful to others.

Sharon brings lessons learned from her own experiences into her work. Caring for both of her parents at the end of their lives motivated her to share information professionally about wills and planning for end of life care. "I'm aging now with my clients, and I'm finding that a lot of my clients are really at a period where they are reevaluating and realizing that the end of life really is going to come around the corner, and we really need to spend a little time thinking about it."

Sharon shared her expertise in this area as a panelist for the End of Life Series in the RCWMS Elder Women Program, where she spoke about estate and health care planning. "What was particularly compelling [about the workshop] was to do it in a more personable way... in a context of women really sharing the feelings that are coming up around planning and their estate and so forth." During her session, she encouraged participants to role-play conversations with family members about decisions that might be difficult to discuss, such as estate distribution or power of attorney. Sharon encourages women to deal with these tough questions sooner, rather than waiting for a tragedy. "There are so many myths and misconceptions around estate issues, and dying, and inheritance. I think people really welcome the opportunity to learn about that."

Sharon has felt inspired by the Elder Women Program's affirmation that we don't have to deal with these issues alone. "I admire women's resilience and courage to identify their issues and face them and do something about them, rather than hide your head in the sand... This is important and needs to be dealt with, as scary as it is, but other people are struggling with those same things."

Sherylyn Pitt is a psychotherapist and an ecotherapist. She holds a Master of Social Work from UNC Chapel Hill and is a licensed clinical social worker and addictions specialist.

She began offering and creating retreat and workshop experiences in her teen years and has always been fulfilled and energized by gathering circles of diverse people with a primary focus on the Sacred in the Natural World. A grandmother and an elder, she is dedicated to modeling consciousness and to supporting a healthy, healing, reciprocal relationship between humans and the earth, her work has spanned the last three decades providing mental health / addiction treatment and continuing education to professionals in the behavioral health field. Her clinical focus has been spirituality, trauma, grief, addiction and behavioral health care offerings to a wide variety of ages and populations. She integrates ecotherapy, the arts, mindfulness,

ecocontemplation, somatic, spirituality, ritual, indigenous council circle, cognitive behavioral therapies, feminism and social justice models into her therapy practice in the Triangle of NC.

Part III — Resources (curated in 2019)

Books

Being Mortal, Atul Gawande

A masterful exploration of aging, death, and the medical profession's mishandling of both. Guidance for end of life issues and choices.

Composing a Further Life, Mary Catherine Bateson

Stories of remarkable people living their second adulthood as an "improvisational art form."

Conscious Living, Conscious Aging, Ron Pevny

An inspiring new model for entering and living the elder years, which encourages elders to shine their inner light brightly into the years ahead.

Doing Sixty & Seventy, Gloria Steinem

A personal commentary on her experience and thinking about the liberation that comes with aging.

From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

A wise and inspiring guidebook to the aging process with focus on spiritual eldering. Very highly recommended.

The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully, Joan Chittister

Speaks of the blessings and burdens of growing older. Highlights the spiritual treasures that may be discovered as we embrace our elder years.

Goddesses in Older Women, Jean Shinoda Bolen

A landmark book that will inspire the older and wiser women's movement women to once again transform society.

Grandmothers Counsel the World, Carol Schaefer

Indigenous wise women elders and healers from around the world offer their vision for our planet for the seventh generation and beyond. Truly inspirational.

The Grace in Dying, by Kathleen Dowling Singh

As this author awakens us to the spiritual aspects of dying, she offers us deep reassurance and adds meaning to our final chapter of life. Her work as a transpersonal psychologist with a large hospice in Florida has informed her writing of this profound book, so full of wisdom and compassion.

Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry, Carolyn Toben

This is a love story of learning to see with the heart. Thomas and Carolyn speak of the mystical attraction between the natural world and our souls and the vital importance of the divine-human-earth relationship.

Retiring but Not Shy: Feminist Psychologists Create their Post-Careers, edited by Ellen Cole and Mary Gergen

Stories by women of the “silent generation, or the pre-baby boomer women,” the first generation of professional feminist women.

Ripening Time, Sherry Ruth Anderson

Stories about aging with grace and wisdom reveal this time of life as an opportunity to begin a journey of profound transformation into elderhood. With humor, maturity, and depth, the author invites us to explore the gifts, blessings, and challenges of old age.

Sacred Circles, Robin Deen Carnes and Sally Craig

An inspirational guide to creating your own women’s spirituality group.

The Sage’s Tao Te Ching, William Martin

Ancient advice for the second half of life.

Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth, edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

An epic collection of essays by elder visionaries such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Joanna Macy and Wendell Berry about a spiritual response to the ecological crisis of our earth home.

The Third Chapter, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

Stories of individuals making their way through the years after 50 with passion, risk and adventure at the center. A compelling vision of the possibilities for our elder years.

The Three Secrets of Aging, John C. Robinson

The extended years we have been given offer us an initiation into an entirely new stage of life, a transformation of self and consciousness, and a revelation of a new and sacred world. Through the telling of his personal story, Robinson approaches aging as a call to awakening.

Urgent Message from Mother, Jean Shinoda Bolen

The author invites us all to join the next, most powerful wave of the women's movement and speaks clearly about what is at risk. An exceptional book of feminine spiritual wisdom and activism.

Websites

The Center for Conscious Eldering

www.centerforconsciouseldering.com

Circle Connections: Circles Connecting for Peace & Justice

www.circleconnections.com

Commonweal End of Life Conversations Series

<https://tns.commonweal.org/event-series/end-of-life-conversations/>

Podcasts by Rachel Naomi Remen, Ram Dass, Angeles Arrien, Scott Eberle, Francic Weller, and others.

Consider the Conversation

www.considertheconversation.org

The Elderwoman Website

www.elderwoman.org

Fierce With Age

www.fiercewithage.com

Gather the Women

www.gatherthewomen.org

Gray is Green

www.grayisgreen.org

International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers

www.grandmotherscouncil.org

Dr. Jean Shinoda Bolen

www.jeanbolen.com

The Legacy of Wisdom Project

www.legacyofwisdom.org

PeerSpirit

www.peerspirit.com

Sage-ing International: Finding Meaning in Second Half of Life

www.sage-ing.org

Spiritual Ecology

www.spiritualecology.org

Spirituality and Practice

www.spiritualityandpractice.com

70 Candles: Stories from Women in the 70s

www.70candles.com

WisdomBridge: Reclaiming Our Indigenous Soul

www.wisdombridge.net

Films

For the Next Seven Generations captures the inspirational story of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers from all around the world who came together to help us create a new way of life that will bring the planet back into balance before it is too late.

[*Griefwalker*](#) a profound film about death and dying that is full of wisdom about living our lives with passion and meaning.

[*Praying with Images*](#) is a film about artist, mystic and teacher, Meinrad Craighead. Weaving together elements of Catholicism, Native American shamanism, and ancient mythology, her paintings erupt in expansive images of God as Mother.

Taking Root tells the dramatic story of Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai whose simple act of planting trees grew into a nationwide movement to safeguard the environment, protect human rights, and defend democracy—a movement for which this charismatic woman became an iconic inspiration.

