



HONORING THE FEMININE DIVINE
 IN OUR OWN
 DEEP BEINGS,
 IN EACH OTHER,
 AND IN THE
 WORLD

MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS



COCO NEWS, SEASONAL REFLECTIONS, EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEW MEMBER WELCOMES

Unitarian Universalist Womenspirit Newsletter

SHE SPEAKS



Photo by Susan Baylies. Dawn at The Mountain at the 2023 Fall Event

From the Editor

I wrote this letter in my sleep early this morning before the sun rose.

Later today, my husband and I leave town to spend Samhain with my nephews (aged 1 and 4), mostly in typical Halloween fashion. All of us will be pirates - trick-or-treating in 24 degree weather in Montana - and it may be the first time in my 40 years that I see my father in a costume.

The week has been a whirlwind of preparing to be out of town and take off from work. Dealing with sick kids, spending extra time with clients, cleaning the house, and of course, creating this newsletter. It appears that the trend will be to save my letter for last, and last night I tried to force the words to come. I default like this into productivity sometimes: just push through it when it needs to be done. And aren't our work ethics all conditioned by our Puritan ancestors?

It didn't take much "Just do it!" before I paused and asked myself, "What if you used the spirit of Samhain in this process?" I opted simply to open to creative forces inside and out, to simply receiving words, and I went to bed.

Early in the quietest, most auspicious time before the sun rose, I half-awoke with the words coming to me in the dreamtime between sleep and waking: Sometimes *doing* looks like *doing nothing*.



With permission to be dormant in service of *undoing*, nourishment, and rebirth,

Iris Padgett - *She Speaks* Editor

Welcome New Members

The following are new members of UUWomenspirit since our last issue, and they are being recognized with their permission:

- Shelley Graff - Cincinnati, OH**
- Bobby Holt - Greensboro, NC**
- Tara Lopez - Townsend, GA**
- Laura Moody - Byron, GA**
- Cydney Morel-Corton - Beaufort, NC**
- Wilma Oman - Asheville, NC**
- Amy Smith - Atlantic Beach, NC**
- Claire Thornton - Raleigh, NC**

WELCOME and a warm thank you to these women for connecting with and supporting UUWomenspirit!

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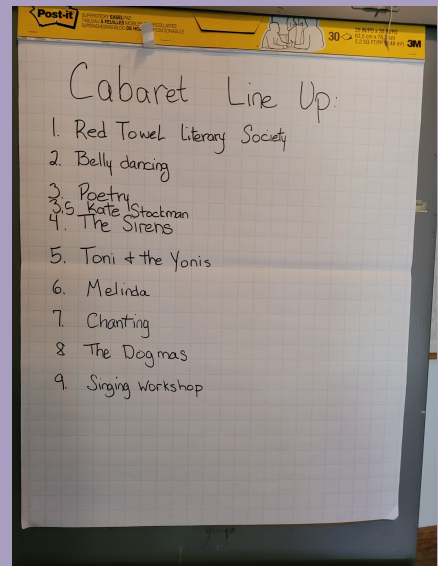


Photo by Arianna Bara. Anticipating Cabaret!

QUICK SAVE THE DATES

Next
in-person events

May 15-19, 2024

Oct 2-6, 2024

Next virtual Book Club
meeting

Nov. 14, 2023

*Details including times, topics, registration, and
access in Upcoming Events below!*



Happy prolific
Okra reaching
To the sky.

-Penny Featherstone



Presence

She came to sit in autumn's silence,
To erase such worrisome thoughts,
Where miracles were revealed to her,
With a simple, falling, leaf.

Its yellow and brown body,
Floated not to the ground,
Fated by brothers and sisters,
But hung suspended in flight.



The oak leaf was transformed into,
A small ballerina posed for debut,
Dancing with the wind,
Flying high in the breeze.

It touched ground with each lunge.
Twirling and whirling to offer its display,
With such magnificence of daring and
grace,
Refusing to rest on an awaiting stage.

The wind was strong,
The dance continued,
Moments of joy filled the air.
All worries ceased.

The child's eyes observed a fairy.
The mother's eyes recognized a spider's
masterpiece
The elder's eyes surrendered into the
magic of life.



-Betty Brown

News from the CoCo

The Coordinating Council, or CoCo, is the governing body of UUWomenspirit. The current members are Nina Brewer-Davis (Marketing and Outreach Coordinator), Shauna Ireland (Volunteer Coordinator), Christine Grewcock (Registrar), Judy Padgett (Membership Coordinator and Treasurer), Rev. Maggie Lovins (Program Resource Liaison or PRL), and Beth Flanagan (Scribe).

Greetings from the CoCo! The Fall Event, *Reverence for the Universal Spiral: All Things in All Seasons* was heart-filling and beautiful. We had 65 women attending (53 at Institute and 64 at Gathering), and 10 of those came for the first time. Of those attending, six women were under 40 years old, nine women between 40-49, 17 between 50-59, 19 between 60-69, and 13 were 70 and older.



We are happy to report that at our membership meeting during the event, three women were affirmed to their new positions in UUWomenspirit. Shauna Ireland was affirmed as Volunteer Coordinator (starting immediately), Victoria Fredrick was affirmed as Marketing Coordinator (starting in January), and Katie Bloedau was affirmed to join the Searchettes.

The Mountain will be raising rates by \$15 per night next year, followed by an additional \$5 per night the following year. This increases the costs of the event for attendees as well as for the organization as a whole, since a number of people involved in running the event have their costs reduced or fully paid for by the organization. During the membership meeting, the CoCo proposed addressing these additional costs by asking the Chaplain to participate in planning the events. This led to a lively discussion, so we suggest we do this on a temporary or trial basis. This change is in line with recent practice of some planning committees, in which chaplains have actively participated in the planning process, and with our Sacred Text, which has long stated that planning committees are five or six members. We are proposing that the Chaplain comprise the sixth member, with the qualification that the Chaplain's role during the event is not expected to change.

The CoCo has been working with the Mountain to clarify our contracts for 2024 and starting our contracts for 2025 and beyond. With fees increasing, we have made an arrangement with the Mountain so that **when four or more women stay together in a bunkhouse, the cost of lodging will be discounted.** This is an option the Mountain has always offered. In the past, UUWomenspirit preferred that the cost of attending be equally shared by all, but with rates increasing we decided it was a good time to incorporate this option in our registration. Something to consider for future events! It's worth keeping in mind that the bunkhouses are very close to the dining hall!

From the Treasurer/Membership Coordinator

Finances remain healthy for UUWomenspirit, with good balances in both of our scholarship funds and our general operating fund. With the increases coming next year from The Mountain, we are looking for creative ways to balance the event budgets. The Fall 2023 event made a profit due to the need to cancel several workshops because of low sign-up numbers for those sessions. Also, the Planning Committee was generous with their gifts-in-kind, particularly with the beautiful decorations in the Treehouse, which were auctioned off after Cabaret and netted over \$1500 for the scholarship fund. We also had a very successful silent auction, which again benefits the scholarship fund. Thanks to everyone who purchased items at the auctions and Brigid’s Bazaar and who donated funds during the registration process.

Financial Report Fall 2023 Event

INCOME	
Program Fees Collected	7300.00
Merchandise Sold	1111.00
Total Income	8411.00
EXPENSES	
Credits Given (Planning Committee, Track & Workshop facilitators, Chaplain)	5805.00
Event Expenses (Facilitator gifts, worship, registration, social hour, merchandise cost, bank processing fees)	2196.31
Total Expense	8001.31
Event Profit	\$409.69

We currently have 109 members for the 2023 calendar year, with 21 new members. Thanks to all women who have paid dues for this year, as that is the funding source for the behind-the-scenes working of UUWomenspirit. Our dues currently are \$45 per calendar year, and our annual dues solicitation appeal will go out in January. We hope you continue to support us by renewing your membership when you receive the annual dues letter. To check the status of your membership, contact Judy Padgett at treasurer@uuwomenspirit.org.

The latest venue news is that once again, starting with our Spring 2024 event, we will be able to use Emerson cabin in addition to our regular lodging options. The Executive Director has been residing in Emerson for several years but is now moving into Cliff Haven. Emerson is a wonderful location for our Planning Committees, as it has multiple sleeping quarters, a living room, and a kitchen. Since our Planning Committees usually arrive early, need to provide food for themselves before the event starts, and need a place for staging the event and for meetings, it is the perfect location. We’re so thankful Emerson will be available to us again! Thank you to The Mountain!

Cross Quarter Days

SAMHAIN

Eve of October 31 - Morning of November 1, 2023

What Samhain means to me, a Wiccan.

The ancient Celts who lived in an agricultural society based their lives on the planting, growing, harvesting, and resting seasons of the land. It is believed that they celebrated what today we call the major sabbats: Samhain, Imbolc, Beltane, and Lughnasadh, but not the solstices and equinoxes. An exception to that might be Winter Solstice, which has been celebrated for centuries as far back as the Stone Age by people throughout the world. It is important to remember that Oct. 31 is the beginning of the season of Samhain, which lasts until Winter Solstice. It is not just one day.

Although the seasons are circular and have no beginning or end, many believe that Samhain was the “New Year,” as all the outside work had ended and folks could spend the long, cold winter inside close to the fireplace. Perhaps the men repaired harnesses and other necessary tools and the women spun and weaved. As they huddled close for warmth, they also probably told stories to educate, entertain, and remember the past. It was a time for physically going within.

As a Wiccan who follows the great Wheel of the Year, I see Samhain as a time to “go within” spiritually. It is a time to do the deep inner spiritual work of evaluating, dreaming, planning, resting, and preparing for the coming seasons of “outer work.”



Samhain is also part of the dark time of the year. It reminds me of the great need in my life for darkness as well as light and that darkness should not be feared. It is vital for the resting trees, the acorns in the earth, the baby in the womb, and the earth itself to replenish. I believe it is also vital for us to replenish and rest.

It is a deep shame that the season of Samhain has been so commercialized as Halloween. The true meaning of this season has been lost as the focus has been on ghouls, ghosts, scary costumes, and witches with green faces - all of which brings in much money to retailers. For me, the most important symbol of Samhain is the cauldron, the feminine symbol of the womb of birth and regeneration.

Lest I sound like an ol’ fuddy-duddy, I enjoy the festivities of the secular Halloween also, but I try not to lose sight of the original meaning of this very sacred sabbat.

Blessed be!

-Toni Stephenson

Samhain Reflections & Ritual

Practices for Samhain season are ones that draw energy in, release or store away what we don't need right now, help us rest and recharge, help us remember, help us maintain hope and levity, honor natural cycles, fortify and restore us, enter us into liminal space, and connect us to the Great Mystery, ancestors, Self, and Spirit. Use these themes to customize your ritual.

Decorate your altar with seasonal items that move you into a deeper, more mystical mindset. Seasonal flowers, dried leaves and acorns, moss or straw, harvest foods and drinks, photos of ancestors, candles, warm lights, carved pumpkins, symbols of death/rebirth/change, and divination tools. Adorn yourself in comfortable ritual clothing or costume and put on music if these make your magic more potent. Cleanse with smoke or sound. Cast your circle and call the directions and Goddesses: Hecate, Persephone, Lilith, Hel, Morrigan, Diana.



Begin with a meditation. Position your body in a way that allows you to fully let go. If you like, use *supta baddha konasana*, a yoga pose to release, restore, and receive. Lie back on a bolster or two stacked pillows parallel to the spine. Use a rolled towel or smaller blanket to support your head and neck. You may use a prop like a yoga block or books under the top end of your bolster to angle it for a less intense backbend. Your bottom should rest completely on the floor at the other end of the bolster or pillows. Bring the soles of the feet together and allow the knees to open. Rest the knees on cushions or blocks. Rest the palms face up on the floor.

Cover yourself with a

blanket if needed. Use an eye pillow or close your eyes. Get comfortable enough to stay for at least 15 minutes if possible. Take a few deep breaths. Slowly, starting with the feet, scan all the way through the body, giving time to intentionally relax and let go of each individual part. Imagine yourself as a tree, drawing and storing energy in and down, releasing effort and surrendering your leaves. What can you let go of? After the scan, spend time contemplating opening to mystery, to guidance or communication from those who came before you, to unconscious parts of Self. Are there questions that arise? Are there things you would like to say to yourself or your ancestors or to Spirit? Slowly open your eyes and gradually move the body. Roll to the side before sitting up.

Maintain this sense of openness and turning in. With a journal and pen, use the *dominant hand* to write those questions or words that came to you. Then, allow the *non-dominant hand* to write down any responses that you intuitively "hear." Don't worry about legibility or think too hard; just let the words come to you.



Photo by Shauna Ireland.

Include any other ritual activities that are poignant to you. When you are ready, take a moment to send love to all the UUWomenspirit sisters, thank the spirits and directions, and open the circle.

2023 Fall Event

The theme of our fall event was **Reverence for the Universal Spiral: All Things in All Seasons.**

Together we celebrated the novelty, mystery, and power in the Universe around us. Six teachers helped us along the spiral in the worship services – Sun, Bee, Tara, Dog, Hawk, and Tree – who taught us about pantheism, connection, acceptance, reverence, and love.



Photo by Shauna Ireland.



There was a treasure trove of track and workshop offerings to nurture our minds, bodies, and spirits. We enjoyed activities that are tried and true at Womenspirit such as drumming and dancing and cabaret, and we dabbled in some new ones such as karaoke. We welcomed many new women to the event, and we look forward to them coming back for years to come. The beauty of The Mountain was stunning as we felt

the cooler fall air fill our lungs and took in the gorgeous early Autumn weather and colors popping out all around.



Photo by Shauna Ireland - Thank you Fall Planning Committee for your magical work!

In summary, the Goddess was afoot with sacred ritual, dancing, drumming, and merriment.

2023 Fall Event



Photo by Arianna Bara - preparing for Sacred Sound workshop.

Readings from Fall Event

Charge of the Star Goddess, written by Valerie Valiente, adapted by Starhawk, as printed in the Motherpeace Tarot Deck
The Little Soul and the Sun by Neale Donald Walsh (adapted by Mylissa Buttram)
Death is Nothing at All by Henry Scott Holland
Eight Little Dogs by Victoria Fredrick
Hymn to the Sacred Body of the Universe by Drew Dellinger
The Resting Place by Victoria Fredrick

Music from the Fall Event

Follow the Sun by Xavier Rudd
Closer to Fine by The Indigo Girls, plus Andrea Johnson
Seasons of Love written by Jonathan Larson, performed by the original cast of Rent
Hymns from the Hive by Layne Redmond
Proserpina by Martha Wainwright
May the Long Time Sun Shine Upon You by Paul Wheeler
Returning by Jennifer Berezan
No Part Left Out by Kathleen Hannan
By Your Side by Allison Russell
As One by Denean
You're Not Alone by Allison Russell & Brandi Carlile
Down by the Water by Abigail Lapell
We Circle Around - traditional Arapaho chant
Nightingale by Norah Jones, sung by Andrea Johnson
Glorious by MaMuse
You're Not Alone by Shelley Graff, first-timer to UUWomenspirit and long-time singer/songwriter
Ancient Green by Kathleen Hannan
May the Circle be Open, traditional Goddess chant



South-May the fiery gaze of the Sun and its precious energy catalyze our greatest intentions for the good of all life.
 May it Always Be

Photo by Shauna Ireland - South altar for workshop.



Photo submitted by Arianna Bara.

The Resting Place

by Victoria Fredrick

you bless the Earth by laying down roots

above a highway, maybe
or a scrub of land in an office park
or amidst an ocean of cars overlooking a blacktop sea

perhaps on the side of a low mountain, midway to the peak

it's all the same underground
where you learn your mysteries



halfway up the trail, you are invisible
to the ones who give you names
the ones who still can sometimes see
the same way you sense the sun on open leaves

a group of them come by
noisier than chattering squirrels
or crickets at dusk

Grandmother sits on the Rock tangled in your roots
your anchor for a century, shrinking as you have
grown
her weight like a bird but infinitely more delicate

you know her somehow from both long ago and now
although she wasn't Grandmother then
she'll stay here, she says

*But doesn't she want to come to the top?
A shame to waste the hike, they say
Doesn't she want to see the view?*

they wonder, and you wonder too
you've heard it's beautiful up there

she's been up to the top before, she says
she tells them she will rest a while
that this is the perfect place

you feel a rush of pleasure at these words
you feel her heartbeat, a tattooed rhythm
a pulse like the tides, just quicker
susurrating like a soft windy whisper

her back relaxes into your trunk
you feel the warmth like gentle hands
you feel her mind quiet, although even when still
it somersaults on a tangled, flitting journey
like a butterfly in the height of summer

and for a few moments you understand ideas

like warmth and gentle hands
and permanence in where you stand
and memories of times that are not now
in places that are still here
where you have always been

you feel her bones, stiff and hollow
like winter-dried branches

but when she was girl
she wrapped around this Rock like a creeping vine
all soft flesh and sticky fingers
those hands again, sending shivers through you,
half wonder and half fear, not knowing their strength
back when you were still soft and supple too

those racing thoughts like the horizon you had never
seen
dwarfed among your ancestors, branches stretched
toward the sun
dappling down to you like raindrops or morning dew

back when you both could still bend without breaking

she is remembering that trip from long ago
although she doesn't remember you
there are other Rocks at the top
that she remembers better than your Rock
the breeze up there cooling sweat
that trickles like sap on salted skin

you see the horizon stretching out
a web of branches and leaves over hidden roots
labyrinthine mysteries that you have learned and
loved and forgotten
and then her mind tumbles back
you feel it, centering in her chest, her belly
as she leans in to you again, looking down at your
roots
where they have wrapped around your Rock, where
moss has grown
and little white mushrooms thin as a spider's leg
tickle the air, reminding you that you will join them
there
in the dirt when your own marrow dries like hers
softening again into rich, loamy Earth

does she think this, or do you?

you have all of her attention for a perfect moment
as her eyes close, she senses the sun on each rustling
leaf
she feels your roots
tangling into an
infinite, spiraling
web



and you both realize
that she never really
left

Until this fall event I was not aware that fairies took showers but apparently they do. I was not sharing my cabin space during the Gathering. I left my cabin (10A) on Sat. evening at 5:00 and did not return until 1:00a.m. Imagine my surprise to find my shower stall very wet and with water on the floor! Fairies are often playing tricks on me but this was a first! Maybe they decided to Trick or Treat early, and I did not have any treats for them. At any rate, I hope the water was warm enough for them to be comfortable. May the Fairies be with you!

- Toni Stephenson



Photo by Arianna Bara.

Our online **monthly book club** for members continues with the new book *Cycles of Belonging* by Stella Tomlinson. All members are invited to attend whether they have done the reading or not! **The next meeting is Nov. 14 via zoom. The link will be emailed to members.**

According to Womancraft publishing website:

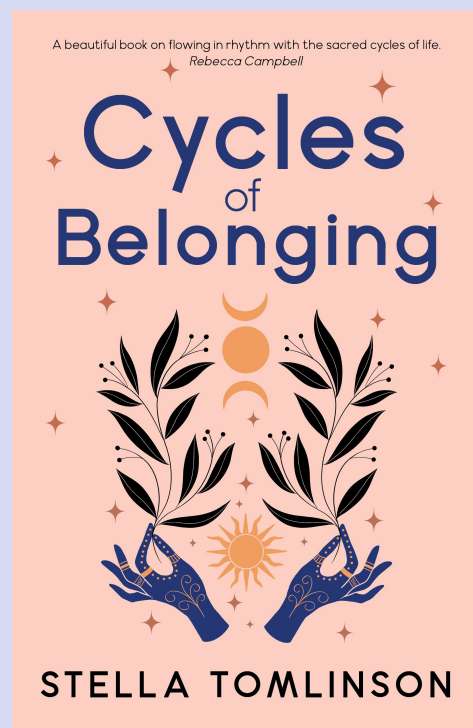
“Cycles of Belonging: Honouring ourselves through the sacred cycles of life is a guide to unlocking the powers of cyclic living to lead a more fulfilling, meaningful, and wholehearted life. It offers an embodied feminine and feminist psycho-spiritual path for women to reclaim their inner wisdom, follow the callings of their soul, and come home to a profound sense of belonging to the seasons and cycles of life.

Cycles of Belonging guides you through six sacred temples of belonging:

- Presence - the breath cycle
- Daily Rhythms - the circadian cycle
- Sacred Blood - the menstrual cycle
- The Moon - the lunar cycle
- The Sun - the solar cycle, exploring the seasons and the wheel of the year
- The Life Cycle & Goddess Archetypes - exploring the life cycle archetypes of Maiden, Lover, Mother, Queen, and Crone

Each Temple explores the energies of each cycle, their healing gifts and shadows/challenges, together with practical suggestions on how to work with the cycles, including journal prompts, rituals, and blessings, as well as magical words of poetry and soul guidance.

Stella Tomlinson is a Priestess, author and restful meditation guide, sharing a healing path honouring life's sacred cycles and the callings of the soul. Her work has evolved from over twenty years' experience in personal and spiritual development through meditation, yoga, mindfulness, energy healing, and Goddess and Earth-based spirituality and she has been teaching and writing in these fields since 2011.”



Member Announcements

A Call for Help Creating 'Witches are Wonderful' Event

On the way home from Womenspirit last spring, a vision of a wonderfully witchy Womenspirit filled my mind. I stopped and made notes and hope this event may crystallize in our collective future. However, I found out that there are already three PC's (Planning Committees) working on three other upcoming events, which means that about 18 women who are willing to plan events are already busy doing that. I have only been on a PC once in 1997, and hope that I can find at least someone who has more recent planning experience at Womenspirit to help realize this vision. But even if you have never been on a PC, please consider this, especially if you self identify as a witch as I do. My journey as a witch has been entwined with feminism, and inspiration from learning about goddesses who are archetypes for us as we reclaim our power. I think the negative stereotypes about witches stem from men's fear of women being powerful and self-directed, instead of subservient. So here's my idea, if you want to collaborate to make it happen for the Spring 2025 event (that is the next available time), please contact me at sbaylies@gmail.com! -Susan Baylies

Witches are Wonderful - Weaving Your Will in the Web

Themes:

Empowerment - personal and in communities, ancient wisdom, self-discovery, becoming open to mystery and magic, synchronicity and serendipity, psychic skills, energy work (auras, chakra work, healing hands, etc.), directing your will into action, connection to like-minded spirits

Possible Workshops:

- Herbal magic: healing herbs, potions, lotions, etc.
- Divination: Tarot and other tools
- Herstory of Witchcraft, both ancient and modern to the Neo-pagan movement today
- Guided Meditation and trancework for self empowerment and healing
- Reclaiming Your Power, Words Matter, Mary Daly - the Wickidary
- Patriarchy and Matriarchy - hierarchy or co-operative models of community
- Shamanism - witches around the world



Feel free to throw more ideas into my cauldron of imagination for this wonderful event, even if you can't commit to being on the PC. I am open to all witchy input.



Photos taken at The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in Highlands, NC: on the left by Arianna Bara, on the right by Magi King.



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I sell original photography based items: (coasters, greeting cards, prints, magnets, playing cards, coffee mugs, ornaments).



Wingshuck Corn Shuck Dolls

Anne Freels

anneofriel@gmail.com 865-705-9755
www.wingshuck.etsy.com
Facebook: Anne Freels and Wingshuck

Colorful corn shuck dolls representing the seasons, the holidays on the Wheel of the Year, traditional Appalachian, altar dolls, kitchen witches and Halloween and Samhain witches.



Annie Egypt Herbals

Anne Freels

anneofriel@gmail.com 865-705-9755
Facebook: Annie Egypt Herbals

All natural herbal soaps and skin care made in small batches without synthetics or preservatives.



Snake and Snake Productions

<http://snakeandsnake.com>

919-627-3138

Susan Baylies makes her lunar phase card and related products, t-shirts, goddess jewelry, and astrology charts.



Two Witches in a Kitchen

Maggie Lovins

Handmade, personalized items for you, your home, and your kitchen.

https://www.etsy.com/shop/TwoWitchesinaKitchen?ref=search_shop_redirect



Rain's Obsessive Stitchery

Rain Pope <http://rainsews.com>
rain@rainsews.com 615-238-7760

Hand-dyed yarn and clothing, embroidered items including towels, tarot bags, and UUWomenspirit logo items, chainmaille jewelry, and various other shiny things.

Interested in contributing original poetry, ads, photography, art, tribute, gratitude, healing support requests, news, announcements, or other original content?

Send your submissions to:
newsletter@
uuwomenspirit.org

Please include your full name and a brief, sentence-long bio with your original submissions - let's get to know each other even better! If you submit work by another, please attribute it accordingly. Send names when submitting photos with faces, please. Submissions should be no more than two pages or about 500-600 words.

Your work makes the newsletter more vibrant and is appreciated greatly.