

You are probably asking yourself, “What in the heck is riprap?” Maybe it’s some kind of make-believe word. You might assume it’s the newest trend in hip-hop music or some sort of new criminal tactic employed by a wily group of New York gang members intent on wreaking havoc. Riprap is a legitimate word and is defined by The American Heritage Dictionary as “a loose assemblage of broken stones erected in water or on soft ground as a foundation.” Remember this word the next time you overdose on R’s and P’s during your next game of Scrabble.



One might say that Beaufort is built on riprap. I suspect the contractors that worked on our newly completed waterfront battled the forces of water and earth to create a reliable foundation. Our community is a type of riprap, a chipped and colorful mosaic of faces, personalities and endless natural surprises bobbing on our wavy surface of heritage, development and growth. Even now, the marsh grasses sway in their seasonal aquatic mutation, greening under brackish waters and molting their brown skins of decaying stalks. New, bright growth appears as each tide recedes. It disappears again under slate gray waters as roots adsorb nutrients from plough mud, stretching to emerge into the prospect of summer sunlight.

I have been preoccupied with the challenges of change over the past few weeks and how I will assemble all of its disjointed pieces – my personal riprap – into a calm and disciplined existence. Recently, I had a conversation with Tatiana, my dear Chicagoland friend, who just completed her MBA. After four years of nighttime study and full-time work, she summed up her present days by saying, “I used to think about how I could change the world and now I have decided to let the world change me.” Her comment confirms the elusive truth that we are not in control.

Each of us balances work and personal development in our lives. The constant factor that twists and turns our growth is change. Change is incessant and most of us have come to grips with the reality that a lack of change equates to death. Possibly like you, my personal, evolutionary journey is like riprap. My days are filled with disjointed circumstances like broken seashells tossed about on the ocean’s floor by an ever-changing tide, as if the magnetic pull of reason could make sense of my life changes. My aging is out of my control. Forces of nature and acts of God keep us powerless. Free will and personal choice are our primary implements for creating some sort of planned destiny for ourselves.

Recently I read or heard about a man who intentionally breaks pottery and glues the pieces back together to create a unique piece of earthenware. What makes each piece distinctive and irreplaceable are its cracks and flaws. In her book, *Everyday Sacred*, Sue Bender describes a monk, who goes about the countryside everyday with a begging bowl in his hands. “Whatever is placed in the bowl will be his nourishment that day.” Bender teaches us that we are like that bowl waiting to be filled by the sustenance of each day’s events.

I believe we can set goals, create a vision and foster dreams. I know that circumstances beyond our control can change our directions, our sight and our hopes on any given day. Beyond my daily misgivings and unexplained fears, I am confident enough to do what is good for me, not worrying about the world’s point of view. I am building a foundation of riprap, personal stones that shift in a watery environment of change. And what fills my begging bowl each day are the people and natural wonders God puts in my path.

Like the marsh grasses emerging from their winter slumber under lowcountry waters into summer sunlight, our life cycles and the changes we encounter meld us into the person our

world sees. I like the idea of being riprap, a loose assemblage of broken stones, and I dream of becoming something beautiful. I see God as that twisted potter, breaking His creation through challenge and change, only to recreate me into something distinctive and irreplaceable.