



When I left New York to return home from my last business trip in 2010, snow began to fall. It was not a winter storm like so many of the weather systems that have pummeled the Midwest and shaken the South to its core with bitter cold temperatures. It was soft and quiet. Big, fluffy flakes drifted down to Earth, lit up by the headlights of the small Delta Embraer aircraft destined for Savannah. I will be in Detroit over the holidays, and chances are good that I will see snow. But it is always the magic of the first snowflakes of the season that reawakens my sense of wonder for the white water crystals, knowing that no two are exactly alike.

I will be home in Beaufort the last few days of 2010, tying up loose ends at work and taking what is left of my vacation, spending it on my efforts to be ready for another year. Just yesterday, over a nice dinner with my mom that followed her annual visit to her neurologist, I predicted a new year full of difficulties and gloom. My mother's doctor solidified my confidence in those sentiments during our visit. He told us that the medical profession was on the brink of collapse, that bureaucratic paperwork was keeping him from focusing on his patients, and that cutbacks to those most in need forced patients to travel further to find doctors who would accept their particular coverage. We moved from the quandaries of the medical industry to the precarious financial foundation of Beaufort County and South Carolina, and our uncertainty of both governments' future course in 2011 and beyond.

As we checked out with the lone member of the doctor's staff, Glenn Beck droned on in the background warning the small group in the waiting room that the USA could easily follow some European countries into the dire straits of bankruptcy. The good news is that my mom is doing well, and of all the discourse that took place in about one-half hour, that information is what resonates with me most.

With every revolution of our planet, I believe I am growing older in very interesting times. I believe every generation has had the same feelings. Technology seems to have already passed me by as I digest enough pieces and megabytes to keep me functional at home and in the workplace. I am part of an era whose greedy consumption may leave behind a mountain of

debt so high, that new generations will need finely honed skills in financial discipline to reduce the pinnacle to rubble. But I am still here, an active, taxpaying member in 2011, hopefully working, capable of change, and willing to try. But how and where can I make a difference?

In the past two new years, I chose a single word with the annual goal to implement their meaning in my life. In 2009, my word was *clarity*. In 2010, my word was *balance*. Clarity worked out better than balance. Frankly, 2010 was a year where I struggled to focus amid incredible professional uncertainty. Vacancies stayed vacant, and the rising work load often flooded over into a river of short-term crises, emptying into an ocean of neglect. I struggled to develop an exercise routine. I wandered in and out of Weight Watcher's meetings. I wrote and helped lead a writing seminar this past year, but I did not focus on the real work of writing, the discipline, the stuff of dreams. Between all of my professional travel, I tried to come home and dedicate time to my husband, my mom, and our dogs. On the tightrope of 2010, I think I fell off more than a few times.

So, for this new year, I have chosen the word *present*. My goal is to be where I am, to focus and think more strategically. I want to practice breathing as a tool for prayer and acceptance. I want to move this aging body more often. I want to increase my smiles and be available to the person right in front of me. I want to frequently and spontaneously venture out and into our Lowcountry waters. I want to finish a manuscript. I want to celebrate twenty-five years of marriage. I want my mother's house to sell. I want to find a way to be a positive influence on my community. And I want to do all of these things in a manner that brings all of me to that action at that moment. I am striving for what is probably impossible in 2011, but I want to try.

As I waited to board the plane at LaGuardia for my last business trip of 2010, I practically stepped out of the line of passengers processing toward the air stairs of the plane to reach for a snowflake. I caught one, and watched it melt inside the warmth of my palm. It all flies by so quickly – time, life, goals, snowflakes – and I am convinced that my part in this world is small. But if I am present each day, to every moment, to one person at a time, to one task, to one breath, maybe the new year will travel at a slower and more vivid pace instead of an unmemorable blur. Maybe, by being present, I can build on my past goals of clarity and balance. Maybe, with each passing year, good or bad, I am becoming as unique as a snowflake before I melt away. I am pretty certain I have the “flakiness” part down pat.

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