



I have started at least three columns this year and completed none. Topics on circus peanuts, beheadings, and autumn moved from my mind to the page and they all sound interesting now, and I wish I had finished every one of them.

Maybe they have gone unwritten because they were words moving me through desperate days and were too morose or silly to publish or share. Many times this past year my thoughts have been riddled with self-pity, resentment, binge eating, and the cruelty of a world seemingly gone mad most days. Of all my abandoned subjects, circus peanuts, those orange, mottled marshmallow globs of sugar packaged and for sale in convenient stores and Big Lots, still seems to have potential as a future essay – a bit of nonsense in a too serious world.

Months and months of not writing this column have made me dry – the antithesis of everything Lowcountry – and I do not like it. There is a contest going on this month titled the “National Novel Writing Month.” The event started in 1999 and it isn’t exactly a contest but more of a challenge – to write a novel in one month with the goal of producing more than 1500 words per day. I signed up but I am already falling short, but it has me writing again or thinking about writing, my New Year’s resolution that died in February. I think about writing all of the time – that I am not doing it, that I wish I were doing it, that I am not good at it, and why can’t I find time to do it. Kind of like sex but more like cerebral masturbation. I think my *not writing* is a small lesson in fear. Fear of failure, of not being liked, of not having ideas that are good enough, of making excuses, of not setting priorities for my happiness and of the blank page.

Another real problem is a lack of inspiration, no *aha* moment or impactful thought I believe is worth sharing, that the reader will really care about. Maybe this is selfish or egotistical. Pride may be the silent judge of words that pass from my hands to your eyes, eventually breaking her silence and whispering into my ear telling me my words lack meaning and will not find a home in your thoughts. In the end, I come back to why I really ever started to write

*Whatever*

and it is always because of the unceasing pleasure I find in living in this Lowcountry and sharing

her bounty with words.

My life has truly changed here. For many years, my husband's career and my job rolled me across this country like a loosed bobber sliding over the crests of a pond's ripples. Other than my childhood home in Pennsylvania, I have resided longer in Beaufort than anywhere else and it is strange and wonderful to settle in one place. It is the beauty of the green-golden cord grass and the tidal water that never cease to captivate and hold my attention. I find solace in our seascape.

Yesterday, I walked along the shoreline of the Coosaw River and the remains of dead cord grass carpeted the boundary between land and water like a handmade mat woven only by tide and time. It crunched under my feet and the geometry of it helped me understand that nature is an artist whose creativity man can only mimic. Her exhibitions are never announced and yet . . . they are always on display in wooded and watery galleries all around us. In the last two days, the Woods Memorial Bridge swung open three times during my trek into or across downtown causing me to stop and literally praise God for the beauty of the setting sun or experience gratitude for the refreshment of a three minute nap.

My job takes me away from Beaufort almost every week, to New Jersey or Tennessee or faraway countries, and every time I cross the Chechessee, Broad and Beaufort Rivers, the magnetic pull of Lady's Island under a canopy of stars and moon makes me understand that staying in one place is not as boring or confining as I once imagined. Yet, I wonder, if I didn't go away, would I appreciate South Carolina quite so much?

This past summer, I discovered Mary Oliver's book *Long Life* in a public library in Ohio and bought it on Amazon when I got home. In it, her essay *Where I Live* begins:

*Now and again the earth begins to desire rest. And in the weeks of autumn especially it shows its disposition to calm, to what feels like a stasis, a pause. The ocean retains its warmth, while high, white cloud-boats ride out of the west.*

Surely Mary knew when she wrote those words that one day I would need to read them, at least

this is what I want to believe. Maybe these last months of 2014 are just that for me – a stasis, a chance to ponder “cloud-boats” and put my grey St. Joseph’s football sweatshirt back on. I have more vacation time leftover than I have ever had before in my thirty-four years of work and I am taking every single day. I deserve them and I deserve time to write.

Although I have continued to read Margaret’s thought-filled raves, Jack’s palette of local color and the freshness of Laura’s accidents, I have missed seeing my words in print in the *Lowcountry Weekly*

, receiving a bi-weekly email from Margaret reminding her writers that “it’s that time again,” and the spontaneous critique in the grocery store, at church or on the

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website by readers surprising me and letting me know my column was good, enjoyable, or just okay.

I need to start using my writing muscles again. I need to take the inspiration of our lowcountry and seek out the creativity buried under layers of emails, sales appointments, travel, and obligation. We all have creative muscles and the opportunity to slow down and flex them to recreate. It’s always a matter of priority, commitment and deciding to invest in ourselves. Trust that the dividends of our creativity benefit everyone we touch.

Thanksgiving time is here, and although I have already started my Christmas gift list and begun picking up small presents along the way in my travels to and fro, I want remember gratitude every day. So, I hope I am ending my drought and I am grateful for this place to write, read, be read, and collect the dividends of creativity to reinvest in my life fund.