

The 10th anniversary edition of The Lowcountry gives me an opportunity to pause and reflect on how my life has changed since I moved to Beaufort, and wrote First Beaufort Days, the title of my first Whatever column published in August 2004.



Amazingly, and in all that time, I have still not met my editor, Margaret Evans, but I owe her a debt of gratitude I can never repay for the opportunity to publish my work.

I started writing in earnest in April 2001, three months after my father passed away. At the time, I was living and working in Illinois. Life, and her antithesis, death, present us with the challenges of dealing with grief, and writing turned out to be my relief valve for the emotional pressure that had built up in my soul and heart, slowly leaking through pen to paper, and to Times New Roman font from the keys of a Hewlett Packard laptop.

In February 2004, I traveled alone to revisit Beaufort, a place I had come to know twenty years earlier, and one of two places my husband Mac and I had settled on to begin a new life after my career in the chemical industry had seemingly ended. Mac and I met in 1984 when he was stationed at Parris Island, and I lived in Savannah in a cinderblock, shotgun apartment on Reynolds Street. Ours was a chance meeting at a local bar on Abercorn Street that looks as if it will last a lifetime.

When I arrived in Beaufort on a visit more akin to a reincarnation after being adrift on a tide of job relocations, I parked my Volvo at Two Suns Inn B&B, and settled into a third floor bedroom for a four-night stay downtown. My scouting trip included a meeting with Martin Goodman, Director of the Small Business Development Center of South Carolina, a visit to the Chamber of Commerce, and a call on Main Street Beaufort to discuss my dreams of opening a high-end bait shop. I researched the local real estate market with Sally Fordham, and tried to understand the value of lowcountry properties with respect to my constrained parameters for a mortgage, now an interesting reflection as the economic pendulum broadly swings over the passage of time. During my walks up and down Bay Street, I picked up a copy of The Lowcountry Weekly, and got a taste of the writing, happenings, and the arts that flavor this creative community.

One dark and starry morning during my brief stay, I ventured east toward the ocean, intent on reaching the pier I had fished from with my dad in sweeter times. I had packed my surf rod and a small tackle box for my visit south, hopeful for the chance to wet the line. Casting a rubbery, artificial shrimp into the pre-dawn darkness, I shivered in the crisp sea air, staring out at the horizon as the sun rose over Hunting Island, a full moon setting behind me. I was alone, an insignificant creature grounded by gravity between star and moon, the water beneath me swirling between pilings in a tidal ballet. The cold air bit my face, and the blood flowing to my right hand pulsed to a throb in an effort to keep my fingers warm. My index finger pressed tight against my rod and the nylon fishing line, anticipating the tug of a hungry fish.

There were no bites from the chilly waters at the state park pier that winter morning, but the same round moon that years before had been dressed in an ethereal rainbow ring of night clouds, lighting the January sky over the parking lot of a Pittsburgh Holiday Inn the night before we buried my father, whispered to me now, telling me everything would be okay. I would be

fine. I was home.

I traveled back to Illinois, interviewed with the same chemical company that had laid me off, took a job they offered that would allow me the opportunity to live and work in Beaufort alongside my husband whose career readily transfers, packed up, and left the cold winters of Lake Michigan for the temperate climate of South Carolina.

It was the character and characters of the lowcountry that prompted me to write my first essay for the Weekly. People like Bobby, the caretaker of Public Landing who has found God just off of Highway 17, Alice, deceased owner of First Stop Bait Shop, Minnie, our local daylily expert, and Esau, a fellow that offered me my first important piece of lowcountry advice. "If you keep a trailer closed up in the summer heat," he said, "you'll burn up like a monkey."

But it is the places like Lucy's Creek, the Beaufort waterfront, the Atlantic Ocean and the Port Royal Sands, that provide me with a glimpse of nature's spirituality, adding sustenance to my own. Summers dressed in majestic live oaks with tresses of Spanish moss, golden cord grasses lifting their skirts above tidal waters and plough mud, and clear southern skies bedecked in diamond starlight and scored by the occasional meteor shower.

When I gathered the guts to send in First Beaufort Days to Margaret four years ago, I had no idea I would be a part of the 10th anniversary celebration of this local neighborhood mainstay. I look forward to forthcoming editions of The Lowcountry, of reading my columns to my mother's ever-present ear, and I am grateful to be a part of the tradition and new directions being set by Jeff and Margaret Evans.