

Setting Anchor in Beaufort

Written by Vivian Bikulege



I have been uprooted and relocated many times in my fifty-two years, maybe not as often as some of our military families or the retired executives who have made Beaufort County their home, but I have moved to and from enough places for one lifetime. Even as I write this column, I am on the move. I started this column in Philadelphia, having departed Providence earlier in the day, was rerouted through Baltimore for fuel, all on my way to settle in for one night in Newark before returning home. Although my heart lives on Lady's Island, my feet keep landing in different cities and various states, mostly for the purpose of making a living.

Recently, my good friend Bernie the Monk sent me a small pamphlet by Fr. Joel Rippinger entitled, "Anchoring Your Life," and I took some time to read it during my travels. Fr. Joel writes about stability as a virtue, the idea of staying in *one* place because "...it was in that place where you would discover the truth about yourself." Fr. Bernie did not send this essay to me on a whim. He is always advising me to slow down, pray, and appreciate my loved ones and my dog.

I have lived in Beaufort for six years. Since my graduation from college, it is the longest I have ever lived in any one place. This is intentional. I came here with the goal of becoming a part of a community.

The people I know at the post office, at the bakery and behind the deli counter at Publix, friends from church, and Toby's caregivers at the vet's office, form my community. Because of my mother's health, and my piecemeal attempts to take care of myself, I know a variety of our local doctors and their medical staff. I know a bit about the lives of the ladies that work in my dentist's office, women at the jewelers, the Comcast gals, and my friends at the dry cleaners. Melissa, Jim, and Cornelius have all cut my hair and I have made friends with a variety of

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Walgreen's employees. I have met writers and artists in Beaufort, politicians and academics, and librarians and shopkeepers. Of course, there are my neighbors, my mailman, my garbage collector and Kenny, the friendly fellow who fills my propane tank. I even have dear friends in Bayview Manor, a place in our community where I learn some of my greatest lessons on life.

In the Benedictine monastic order, men take a vow of stability. They make an investment of self into their locale and the land around them. Fr. Ripinger writes that St. Benedict drew a close connection between the questions of "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" Ripinger quotes Basil Hume, late abbot of an English monastery in Ampleforth, who links place and stability to the act of embracing "life as we find it, in this community, with this work, with these problems, with these shortcomings, knowing that this, and not any other, is our way to God."

My point is not to profess that living in Beaufort will bring you closer to some spiritual nirvana, even though the beauty of our water, marshes, and wildlife constantly instill some degree of inner peace for me. Instead, I am using this installment of "Whatever" to try to come to terms with the idea of making *one* place a home, of embracing the work, problems, and even the shortcomings of my home as a way to grow – personally and in communion with others. I am struggling to find the best means to further cultivate my life here. Beaufort defines my choice of lifestyle and I want to be a positive part of our Lowcountry community, but it is difficult in my comings and goings, and time is the precious commodity that is traded in and outside of our homes.

When I boarded the plane in Newark, I left behind a mass of humanity lingering in the airport terminal, people of every race and color, children and the elderly, business people and families embarking on summer vacations. This is "my place" too, but it was comforting to get on the small Continental jet surrounded by the less hectic sounds of passengers boarding the aircraft and taking their seats versus the loud and grating announcements of gate agents detailing yet another delay due to weather.

Before Flight 2312 pulled away from the gate, I watched two pigeons tiptoe under the bellies of planes, oblivious to baggage handlers and mechanics. They were at home, sipping from puddles created by the very rain that had delayed our flight. They seemed to mock me as they walked around catering trucks and luggage carts. They could fly and instead chose to mosey along, hardly bothered by the noise of air traffic and machinery. I sat waiting for the doors to close so we could take off, fly home, and I could make my drive back – over one bridge, then another, and yet another just to get my feet back on South Carolina soil.

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Over clouds, cruising at altitudes that change the appearance of the east coast landscape into blue green picture shows of land mass and water, I wondered how I was anchoring my life, if Beaufort is the best place to grow and eventually pass. Life has many twists and turns and I have never taken a vow of stability. I have always been more excited by change, hostile to any inkling of impending boredom. But the idea of anchoring in a coastal community is a metaphor for my journey. Besides, when Val comes around from behind the lunchmeat counter to give me a hug, I know I am at home and part of something bigger than myself.

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