

One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life.□ that word is love. - Sophocles



We're in the season. Even if you don't associate any religious significance to this time of the year, the fact is, the seasons have changed and there is a different spirit floating over our cooler tidal waters. Our lowcountry is exchanging her autumn-gold chiffon party dress for a velvety, beige winter evening gown trimmed in the dark brown piping of pluff mud and adorned with acorn sequins. Winter accessorizes in red and green holly wreaths complimented by the jeweled glitter of twinkling lights, surprising us in new locations all over town. Even the stars shine more brightly during this time of the year; laser beams of hot white light pierce the darkness of crisp and colder skies. It is our annual opportunity to become melancholy and joyous, reflective and flamboyant.

Reflection seems to come knocking at my door at the strangest times. This past Thanksgiving holiday was just such an occasion. I thawed baggies of frozen squid and bait shrimp and went fishing without much success. The surf was cool on my Keen-clad feet and I had my sweats pulled up above my knees in an effort to keep dry. Having your feet in the ocean in November is a gift.

My very first cast landed too close to the jetty that juts out like a small mountain range into the Atlantic Ocean from the point at Fripp Island. I lost my entire rig in those rocks. Experience and intuition foretold the loss as I watched the poorly executed toss cut to my left, landing among meandering stones, hidden and then exposed by the dark, churning waters. It was a poor cast, a limp attempt to strategically position my bait as dinner for concealed flounder. I reeled in my freed fishing line, unfettered, weightless and flailing in the salty air. As I tied another rig to the end of my line, my mind's wheels started turning and the loss of that rig caused me to think about loss and weightlessness and the thought of losing weight crossed my mind.

I've been trying to lose weight most of this past year. I went back to Weight Watchers in the spring to renew my lifetime membership. As 2008 creeps up on me, I am skeptical that I will reach my goal. It's a continuing struggle and it is doubtful that last week's colonoscopy, although helpful, will sustain any lasting weight loss. But the idea of what weighs us down is bigger than the soft donut around my middle. Weight can take the shape of an emotional burden, as illness or through loss. The weight of financial difficulties, concern for our loved ones and the delicate condition of our Earth are all sources of heaviness that cannot be as easily measured like pounds during a doctor's office visit. Nobody gives you a star or a pat on the back for carrying your everyday load.

Even the holiday season can seem burdensome. To-Do lists, baking, events, charities, decorating, wrapping, Christmas cards – even Secret Santa hovers at the chimney top poised to pounce on your back with one more thing to do! Recently I sat with some friends who were trying to put their finger on the pulse of the season characterizing it as mild depression caused by recession and war. I refuse to take that bait.

Sometimes we take on too much. We try to carry the burdens of others and fail to address our personal needs in some misguided effort at denial or a refusal to look squarely at the man in the mirror. When I was laid off four years ago, I went on a vendetta to simplify, recognizing that I couldn't carry the weight of a five-bedroom mortgage. But, as time passes, my bad habit of acquisition clutters my new three-bedroom lifestyle and the weight of stuff just seems to

Losing & Gaining Weight

Written by Vivian Bikulege

accumulate over time. It takes a long time to learn life's lessons and break bad habits. Getting back to Thanksgiving, I went fishing for a second time that weekend. It was colder outside and my bait was getting ripe, but this time, the tide was in. I choose a different fishing rod. I stood away from the jetty and cast into deeper water. And I caught a fish. This time, the weight on the end of my rod was different. It was alive. My fishing line thrashed under the power of a Whiting, back and forth, deep and then breaking the surface against the pull of my fishing reel. That's just how it is, these cycles of loss and gain. You make choices and let go of what you can't control. As a result, sometimes you catch a fish and sometimes you lose it all - hook, line and sinker.

I am entering this holiday season carrying my weight and craving a Light that is greater than my self. My back is going to get tired bending over the guest room bed to wrap the Christmas presents I stack there. My checking account will lighten up as dollars fly into Christmas cards landing in the hands of others. And I'm going to receive because I am blessed by love – love lost and lavished in years gone by and days ahead. This is a season of losing and gaining weight and my perspective is the only thing I can control. With a little luck, maybe I'll reel in some good cheer. I hope you do. Happy Holidays!