



*Don't be afraid of deep places. - Matthew Kelly*

This past Christmas, I visited my brother's family in the Upstate with my sister Stacie. It was the most time I have spent in a car with my sister in *forever*. We were carrying out Santa's good work by delivering our gifts and experiencing the love in receiving.

On the way up, we made a midway stop in Columbia complete with a Wyndham sleepover and breakfast at the beautiful home of my college roommate. We were joined by Piper, her three year-old granddaughter. It was my first time meeting Piper and one of my best 2017 Christmas presents. It was a delicious road trip trimmed in stripped down cotton fields and holiday decorations, and filled with french fries, milkshakes, Christmas cookies and music, and rare conversation.

Because we'd lost our Mom in 2017, this first Christmas absent her presence was especially poignant. My sister-in-law, also fresh in understanding loss with the passing of her father in April, filled our hollow gaps with gifts of coffee mugs engraved with happy pictures of Irene and ten-dollar, scratch-off lottery tickets, my Mom's greatest vice in her later years of life. Neither of us were big winners. The real prize was the generosity and the treasure of memory.

We also lost Albert in 2017, my brother's yellow lab and a good, good friend of mine. Alby's brother Regis and I had a long walk together while I visited. It was more quiet and less of a challenge without the acrobatics of being tethered to two leashes of significantly sized canines. In the backyard, looking down at Regis' dark brown eyes as he looked up into mine, it dawned on me that Regis and I had less in our lives this Christmas. There was less activity, fewer presents to give and receive, less care, less playfulness, and fewer voices and sounds at the kitchen table. It was an overarching feeling of less. Maybe these are the remnants of grief, the idea and reality of having less in the world. It was a new level of understanding for me. It

was a way of defining the pervasive density of nothingness when someone is gone.

The idea and feeling of less is entwined with my New Year's endeavors. I am choosing the word *inspiration* as my guiding light for 2018. Every year I choose a word as a beacon for what I am seeking. In previous years, balance and focus have been some of my goals. I sought out compassion and patience in my years as a caregiver. This year, as a retiree searching for my second calling and struggling to attain the discipline to write, I need inspiration.

Inspiration is defined as "the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, especially to do something creative." In the physical sense, inspiration is inhalation, the drawing of breath. I need all of this. I need to feel something. I need room to breathe, and most certainly, I need sustained creativity. And this must all be done with less - less money, less angst, and less concern or need for the approval of others. This year, I need to be ruthless in what I give away and throw away. There is duality and conflict in the giving away of stuff and the giving away of self. There is the throwing away of things and the throwing away of creative caution, throwing away doubt but taking back those facets of my identity that make me able and will keep me strong in body, mind and faith. It is exciting and feels tingly.

Inspiration does not mean that every thought that passes through my head is a worthy idea. In fact, I am wracked with goofy ideas. I have misconceptions. I do not always know or understand the trends and vocabulary of twenty-first century life. My nieces and nephews have to teach me things like *memes*. For those of you that don't know, a meme is a "virally transmitted cultural symbol or social idea" usually communicated in a captioned photo intended to be funny or to ridicule human behavior. See what I mean about twenty-first century trends? Tons to know and learn.

I am not sure, but I think my second calling is some sort of mix between writer, doer, believer and hermit. *What?* I bet there is a meme for that. Picture a sixty-year old woman (yes, that happens in 2018 too - Åugh), earphones in and attached to an iPhone, sitting in front of a MacBook Air writing, unread books and a Bible stacked beside her, and all of this in a 24-foot RV with two dogs parked in some out-of-the-way Georgia State Park. Her husband has gone back to work at Parris Island to answer his calling and help pay bills, and one of her dogs, Toby the beagle, is in renal failure and losing big clumps of hair. The meme reads "Ever wonder what the difference is between inspiration and insanity?"

Matthew Kelly, a Catholic Australian motivational speaker and author is coming to Beaufort in

February. Note that I began this column with a quote from him. His institute sent it in an email on December 26. "Don't be afraid of deep places," he writes, and for me this translates into digging deeper into self, going into the unknown, and overcoming uncertainty. And I believe this will come about through inspiration, divine or otherwise, in this new year and for the next decade. I need to follow it. That is the key. What good is inspiration if we don't follow up on it? It doesn't take a lot to be inspired. In fact, inspiration is free, but I know I have to be open to receive. I also know I can be inspired by less because I have to be. Less offers freedom and of course, freedom has come with her price. I have more dues to pay. There is more to lose. There is also so much more to gain. So much. And every once in a while, it will be okay to buy a scratch-off. Irene believed in luck. More importantly, she had hope, and she kept it for a long, long time. She even left some for me.

Happy New Year. Be inspired. Learn to do more with less. Be fearless. Give. Receive. Create. Hope. Have faith. And always, love.