

I am so trying to bring a positive perspective to my first Whatever column of the New Year, and I cannot seem to pull myself out of a 2008 funk.



I could go into detail about why I am down in the dumps, but who really wants to read paragraphs of sullen self-pity?

To stimulate my thoughts and stir the compost heap of my mind, I read “50 Ways to Improve Your Life in 2009,” published in the Special Year End Issue of U.S. News & World Report. Although I have already improved my life by having tackled 3 or 4 of their 50 suggestions from last year, some of World Report’s suggestions are incomprehensible without research, and I do not have the time or inclination to “19. Learn to speak Russian, or 32. Eat your own spinach.”

In years past, I have used this first column of the new year to revisit my previous resolutions, but knowing that I have probably failed to achieve most of those illusive goals, I think what I need more than anything is a gratitude list. So here goes.

1. I celebrated the one-year anniversary of having Toby the beagle in my life on December 26. Self-explanatory. Anyone who owns a dog, or saw the movie, or read the book Marley & Me, understands this gratitude. At the end of his book, John Grogan writes, “A dog doesn’t care if you are rich or poor, educated or illiterate, clever or dull. Give him your heart and he will give you his.” I think that’s what Toby and I have done. I’m feeling better already.
2. I have my health. No, my body and its internals are not in the same shape they were thirty years ago, but I am here. I can think. I can see. I can hear. I can walk. I have a good friend who has been courageously struggling to take just two or three steps, independent from his physical therapist or step dad, and another friend languishing on the edge of a coma as I write. The latter was an editor who would take me aside in church and say, “I liked your last article.” Maybe she’s looking over my shoulder right now.
3. I have a terrific husband and family. This is yet another self-explanatory bullet point. The love and support that I receive from every member of my immediate and extended family is unconditional and never-ending. They have been there for me in the past, and I know if there is anything I need, all I have to do is ask.
4. I have a job. Yeah, it changed again at the end of 2008, and I am struggling with new product technologies, working to grow a new client base, getting used to a new boss, and starting all over again, but what a gift. I have been without work, and I have an appreciation for the dire straits of our country, our economy, and too many of our fellow citizens. I am grateful for what I have, and I must remember to give as much as I can – and the giving can take many forms. Used clothing, a bag of canned goods, nominal monetary donations, elbow grease, a hand, a phone call, or a letter.
5. I live in Beaufort. Mac and I moved to the Lowcountry because of the climate and the pace of life, but my greatest motivator was the water. On the last Sunday of 2008, I put Toby in the car, took a book and a folding chair, and went to Hunting Island. The dark silhouettes of dolphin broke the surface of a gentle ocean. The sun was almost too warm, and I took my tennis shoes

Thankfully Greeting 2009

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and socks off to soak up the coolness of the sand on my feet.

6. I am blessed by beautiful friends. Toby and I stopped at the Day Lily Garden on our way back from the beach to visit Minnie. She and I sat on plastic chairs in her driveway, and marveled at the marked improvements of a stray she picked up about six months earlier. She gave me four grapefruits from a tree heavy with yellow orbs, and filled my sunhat with pink, red, white, and fuchsia camellias – enough to grace my new year's table and my mom's. Pure gifts of natural generosity. I cannot begin to elaborate on each and every friend in my life. I used to say I could count my true friends on one hand. Now, I don't have enough fingers and toes for all of them.

7. I am sober. There was a time I wasn't.

8. I am in school. I will always have something to learn.

9. I have faith. Not enough, but faith is a sure sign of hope, and hope leads to optimism.

Optimism leads to cheerfulness, cheerfulness puts a smile on the bleakest moments, and a smile is a gift I can pass on to others at minimal cost.

10. I have written my first column of the New Year. It is 4:30 in the morning and I can go back to bed, or pour a second cup of coffee, shower and move on, or just lie back and stare at the fire. Today, I will move on.

I have Christmas decorations needing to be put away, upcoming doctor's appointments that could not be squished into 2008 (#11 on my list could be my gratitude to even have health insurance), and a pile of homework that will not be completed in time for my January residency. But hey, I would be remiss if I did not include how thankful I am for the opportunity to write, hoping that someone other than me has benefited from my cathartic transition from a deflating funk to the deep breath of grateful renewal.

If you are having trouble revving up your engines for the challenges we have yet to meet in 2009, take a few moments to jot down, or mindfully consider, your personal list of gratitudes. Food on the table, hot water from the tap, clothing, cheaper fuel, a chance to start over – I could go on and on. Make your list. I'll bet yours is better than the one published by U.S. News & World Report.