



Every new year, I try to find a word to keep in front of me as something to strive for in the days ahead. It usually comes to me with little effort but this year I struggled, grappling for one word to capture the goal of my annual journey. And like it always does, finally, suddenly, the word arrives. This year, it is simply, love. It is a big, little, word.

I choose love because it says "yes" to everything I want to accomplish and be in the new year. I want to take better care of myself. I want to love myself enough to nourish my dreams. I want to have all of the patience I never have to care for my mother in a better way. I want to fall in love with my husband again. I want to recover the love I have for my writing. I want to love my job enough to respect the wisdom of others and excel at more than collecting a paycheck.

You cannot force love of any kind. Sometimes it needs to be earned. Sometimes it never comes.

I have not written a column for the Lowcountry Weekly since July. Just yesterday, I read a passage in a book called *Still Writing* by Dani Shapiro, and it said if you are waiting for that one great idea to put on paper, you will never write. If you are looking to the end of your story and you have not yet stepped onto the path, your steps will never become words.

2013 was a year fraught with new discoveries about my mother's health and I have begun many columns writing about cancer that trailed off into a series of words about nothing. The subject of cancer wears me out. So many people are affected by it directly and indirectly. There are races and walks, fund drives and charities, and sometimes they all seem pointless when radical cells spread in you or someone you love, taking you on a journey you don't want to go on, to a destination with no name. I would rather walk the walk one day at a time, one appointment at a time, one treatment at a time, in a state of unknowing, a fog of denial. But in the end, that is not who I am, and I storm into the battle with a vengeance for all things terminal.

Of course, the opposite of love is hate. Not too long ago, I started a column confessing how much I hate cancer and all of her "B.S." ribbons and races, and the fact that you will never see me at the front of the line to start a new non-profit to raise awareness for anything. If you are living with someone who is living with cancer, isn't that enough? It is. My mom has a rare form of cancer – carcinoid. It's slow growing and has some very yucky side effects, but generally she holds her own and to look at her, you would never know she has it. By choice and necessity, she will never go through chemotherapy, and radiation may be a possibility but only time and Providence have insight into that next step.

So the word in 2014 has to be love because nothing fights cancer, apathy, war, terror, self-delusion, loathing, or hate better, or more comprehensibly, than love.

For days, I thought my word for the new year would be a simple "yes." Yes to perseverance, yes to patience, yes to challenges and trials, yes to self-sacrifice, and yes to tolerance, prudence, and waiting. But love is more gentle, it resonates in touch, a smile and a kind word. Love comes back to you – always. When you are selfish in love, you are covert in your slyness to give back to yourself in the healthiest of ways.

I traveled around the world this past year. I saw young children and dogs on the streets of India, people in open air markets buying vegetables that have no American name in the hidden corners of China, and I touched walls that surrounded Aztec ruins in Mexico. I had another year to give my beagle Toby belly rubs and I learned more about the tenacity of terriers from my mother's dog Trooper. I watched my husband prepare weekly meals for my mom so I could travel on business and return home from a week where I did not know if any of my efforts would pay off. Still don't know. Once a month on Sunday mornings, I gave out donuts to hands in a nursing home, and not often enough, I kissed the forehead of a neighbor. I also made my way to confession many times because I cannot seem to break my bad habits of curt replies and quick judgment.

The year passed by in a quick whirl – so fast that I barely held on. This coming year, I want to greet others with love, compassion, hope, and a bright, big smile. I want to keep loving my job, my dogs, my friends, my family, and my God – probably in reverse order. I want to keep writing this column however trite it may seem or word weary I may be.

Happy New Year to all of you. We continue to be blessed by the beauty of our water and wildlife, the community we call Beaufort, the tourists we call friends, and our tireless energy to

A Word for the New Year

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keep working to sustain our families and one another. I am going to focus on love. It is a huge task and a word I should have chosen many years ago, but I have to start somewhere and 2014 looks like a great place to put a good foot forward.