



Beaufort first “spoke” to me as a destination I just might want to come home to one day when I arrived in her bay in 1999 as first mate on a sweet, lovingly restored, 1974 Jensen sailboat. Such an abundance of water I’d never experienced – tidal creeks, inlets, sounds, the river...yea, the Intracoastal itself...and the Atlantic Ocean, for heavens sakes – all reflected daily sunlight and opal clouds scuttling across a crystalline blue sky.

Wide expanses of marsh were decked in winter hues of gold, yellow and chestnut. And the wildlife. Lordy! Alligators, mink, armadillos, herons, egrets, osprey, ibis, wood storks, marsh hens. Even eagles.

All pure creative stimulation. I understood why hordes of creatives choose to spin yarns, set up easels, leap onto theater stages, snap shutters, pluck strings and toot horns in the luscious Lowcountry. Many move here – present company included – to ply their passion. The water, wildlife and light are simply exquisite and completely energizing. It’s one of those places that creative energy crackles. If you don’t use it to pursue your particular creative dream, someone else may beat you to it.

For three days, Cap’n Steve and I nabbed dock space at Lady’s Island Marina and explored the heart of South Carolina’s Lowcountry before shoving off to celebrate Christmas in Key Largo – “just like Bogie and Bacall” – and toast the millennium in Key West Harbor. All great fun, but Beaufort beckoned me back, with her unspoiled nature and a small-town charm reminiscent of the one that nurtured my childhood memories.

For reasons that had nothing to do with this captivating river town, all-night rest often eluded me

while we were docked here. So as the captain snored below, I'd pad up the steps, journal in hand, to perch on a cushioned storage box on deck and record the mutterings and musings that stole my sleep. And consistently, deep in the dark early morning, a Great blue heron would arrive to fish near the pluff mud just off our bow. The first time I spotted her, she remained so still that I thought she might be a ringer. You know, one of those heron silhouettes. I figured she'd flap away the second she realized I was real. Because nature imbues its own with keen sensory perception for protection, I knew she was aware of me. But I stayed still, taking quiet, deep breaths as I observed her. Each night she posed with nary a twitch, focused on breakfast. Occasionally her beak would dart into the water for prey. She never seemed to miss.

How'd she do that, I wondered, stand on one leg for seeming hours – patient, unmoving – then nab her target every time?
How does nature do anything?

The big question always followed. *H*

Questions I didn't want nor need answers to then. Still don't. I'd rather marvel. The truth of it was that watching her gave me a measure of peace.

I could blather on and on about the preponderance of nature here, as it's one important reason why people love living in the Lowcountry. If my day is a bit iffy, all I have to do is look around and say, "But look where I live," and my mood lifts. This place is flat gorgeous. Nature graces it, provides watery playgrounds for boaters and fishermen, rookeries for up-close marsh bird-and-shorebird viewing, beaches for sand castles and bare footprints, pelican chevrons winging overhead for "ooh's" and "ahh's, and vibrant blooms for every season.

Besides all that, nature feeds the soul. Revel in the marsh as it slips on its spring green mantel, at a creek at low tide as oysters pop in the mud, or at the ocean as a pod of dolphins frolic near the shore. Mother Nature is the reason that folks from away come here, and that locals often either stay or eventually boomerang back.

It's easy to take all this wonderment for granted when you live with it, to assume these natural gifts won't ever change. But please don't. Because they are. Wooded lots are rife with trees ribboned for destruction. A former forested parcel morphs all too quickly into newly-cleared, all in the name of progress. I want to ask land baron Ted Turner if he'd please purchase all the Lowcountry "acreage for sale" and do nothing with it, just keep it green. (If you have connections, feel free to pass my request along....)

Though climate change is a reality – note the frequency and intensity of coastal storms, for

instance – it's up to those of us that love our Lowcountry to continue to treat its nature with deserved respect and not toss in the towel by thinking it's too late. Speak out for environmental causes, pick up trash along the roadside, on the Spanish Moss Trail and in the river; and recycle, reuse and renew *everything* that can be. (Beaufort County's plastic bag ban begins on November first. Get your cloth carryalls ready.) Do your part as a lasting legacy, as a clean footprint on the earth for yourself, your kids and grandkids. Every act of conservation or preservation counts, puts that "I really care" energy back into our thick, moist air.

Above all, don't give up. Every personal effort makes a difference. But for those discouraging times that seem as if man just won't let nature be, take heart in the words of revered author, environmental activist and Kentucky farmer Wendell Berry.

"When despair for the world grows in me

and I wake in the night at the least sound

in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake

rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things

who do not tax their lives with forethought

of grief. I come into the presence of still water.

And I feel above me the day-blind stars

waiting with their light. For a time

I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”

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