

Transformation

Written by Vivian Bikulege



The world is new each morning – that is God's gift, and a man should believe he is reborn each day.

– *Israel Ben Eliezer*

I stood on Fripp Island's shoreline New Year's Day to watch the sun rise. Against the backdrop of an incandescent horizon, small waves rolled across a stretch of beach colliding and tumbling, becoming one and then disappearing, leaving behind the sizzling sound water makes as it sifts and sinks in between granules of sand.

I waited patiently for the sun, focused on the subtle yet constant changes. Swollen white lines left behind by jets bypassing the tiny island for unknown destinations etched the sky. A layer of clouds rested on the salt water creating a hurdle for the sun to scale. I decided to sit on some driftwood to witness the slow rise, and in the moment I turned my back to brush sand from my makeshift seat, the first crest of light appeared and I received an almost audible message. *Don't turn your back on your reality*

You will miss something important

—
a gift, a new beginning, someone in need of your attention, something spectacular

I watched the sun transform from a half oval of new light into a huge orange orb in a matter of minutes. Day broke on the new year. The sun's reflection on the water started at the shoreline, and as the star continued to rise, the light made its way back across the ocean's surface to meet its creator. For a split second, it seemed as if the sea moved backwards, toward the sun, as if the waves were set in reverse, discontinuing their suicide march onto the beach to move closer to something alive and warm. As the light changed from dawn to daylight, the magic of first light faded into the pragmatic existence of the first day of January.

On a beach somewhere in my past, my father taught me how to surf fish. One summer, we had an elementary discussion on perpetual motion and infinity. Usually, we did not talk when we fished. Standing waist deep in salt water, the sun beating our backs brown while the ocean stretched and released our fishing lines like giant rubber bands, we conversed only in short sentences. "Good cast." "Need more bait?" "You got something?" I must have studied the concept of perpetual motion in a science class that spring, and the ocean was the perfect example of never-ending motion. My father used the Atlantic's waves as a visual to explain the word perpetual. He told me that when he tried to grasp the idea of infinity, he considered the ocean stretching out before him, with no end, until it just blended with the horizon and virtually disappeared. The lessons have never left me.

Unlike the constant roll of waves mysteriously pulled by the gravitational exchange between the earth, moon, and sun, most things do come to an end. In 2011, I persevered in my goal to dock my 14 foot Grumman fishing boat in a slip at the Port Royal Landing Marina. The aluminum boat was lovingly and humorously named the *Mean Irene* by my father in a mock tribute to my mother. A souped-up, V-hulled jon boat with a tiny 9.9 horsepower motor, she was a gift to me from my parents after a stroke eliminated my father's capabilities to drive a car and trailer a boat. My plan was to spend the year fishing, learning the waters surrounding Beaufort, and anchoring in hidden creeks for warm naps and solitude.

Aluminum boats do not hold up well in salty air. The frame and snaps that held the blue canvas cover anodized and corroded. I had the engine overhauled and tuned-up, but the limited power of the small Johnson motor was not enough to easily overcome the height and friction of a floating dock. My travel schedule kept me away from Beaufort most of the week, and on weekends, the engine would spit and sputter from lack of use. During one of my few excursions up the Beaufort River, I stalled three times, and I grew concerned about safety, the on-going expense of maintenance, and the slip lease.

I took small steps toward the eventual sale of my boat. I settled for a small refund on the boat slip. Rick, a good and generous neighbor and my engine mechanic, towed the boat back to his house where it sat between the trees in his backyard over three months waiting for my decision on its fate. Before the end of the year, I sold the boat to Rick, salvaging my fishing hat, a small tackle box, and some WD-40. I walked away from the *Mean Irene* and a year of squelched nautical hope.

On January 8th, I watched the dance of sunrise again. This time, I was determined not to turn my back or look away. I saw the split second of the sun's rising, and I surprised myself with words I said out loud to no one, "It's that fast." It is that fast. It is the cresting of dawn's sunlight, the daily turn of the earth moving the sun from east to west across the sky to its setting on our life's time. It's just that fast. Each passing day adds load and age and quietly asks us what changed in us during those last twenty-four hours. It's that fast.

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There are things in life we have to turn our backs on, leave behind and walk away. Disappointment is hard. Decisions, especially the ones asking to let go, are tough. If you look for them, there are metaphors for life everywhere in nature – the recognition of the Infinite in the stretch of the sea, and the constant slap of waves on the shore mimicking the human journey of putting one foot in front of the other again, and again, and again.

On a morning when the rising sun is visible over the ocean, a path of light will eventually form and seem to connect the sandy earth across the water and back to the star. I like to think about my life this way. As I look away from the earth and consider the stars, letting go, looking forward, I will stretch and reach a place of warmth and spectacular light.

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