

Resolutions in Retrospect

By Bette Moore – December 30, 1998

Perhaps New Year's resolutions are best made in retrospect. It seems that when I have actually made a resolution, I'm seldom able to keep it. I may remember it from time to time, but during the course of a year, it seems to serve more as an irritation – reminding me of what I am *not* doing rather than motivation for self-improvement. On the other hand, when I take time at the end of a given year and look back over changes, accomplishments, and events, it seems that patterns begin to emerge.

This process started for me when I began using a computer to write Christmas notes and letters in 1995, but I didn't really see it until this morning, December 30, 1998. As I walked along the cliff outside my house, watching huge logs drifting in and out with the rising and receding tide, I began to see the past few years drifting through my mind in the same way.

Reading over the greetings I wrote to a few old and trusted friends, I realized that 1995 was a very difficult year for me. I remembered the conflict and pain I was feeling. I *now* realize that a process of self-assessment and recovery had begun. But in December 1995 I was simply numb. I was forced to deal with the growing pains of a 16-year-old daughter who, in a drug rehabilitation facility, completed an assignment for an English class called a "Found Poem." Students were to go back through a novel they had recently read to capture words or phrases that caught their attention. They were then to creatively weave these phrases into a poem of their own. The novel was *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The following is an excerpt from the poem my daughter wrote about her relationships. She called it "A Breeze of Confusion."

*. . . Laughter and criticism mask fear in each;
trepidation hides beneath trends, cliques, pressure, and idealism.
The masks create a Mardi Gras of clowns;
we look for the ultimate and dismiss what we cannot afford to lose.*

Now I know that I was the relationship she knew she couldn't afford to lose, but back then, in 1995, I just felt dismissed and confused. She continued to write . . .

*Though I am one to mock these games that conform all,
I know the masquerade and play it well.*

Unusually perceptive at 16, now at 20 my daughter understands her own journey in a way that few people ever do.

That was 1995 and I can see that my life lesson and “Resolution in Retrospect” that year was Self Knowledge and Recovery.

1996 was a turning point. I turned 50 and my daughter turned 18. It was a year of celebration. Looking back I can see why it was the first year I ever wrote a traditional “Christmas Letter.” Written on New Year’s Eve, I explain to my friends and family why I had never attempted to write such a letter:

“Somehow the life of a single mother functioning in ‘survival mode’ for 13 years doesn’t seem to be the ‘stuff’ of such letters.”

Celebration, however, was the theme that year as my daughter realized that legally she was an “adult” and began making positive choices for her life. I was happily married to my high school sweetheart, and life had finally taken a turn for the better.

Still feeling overwhelmed by “busyness,” a little book called *Simplify Your Life* caught my eye early in 1997, and I began a process which I believe ultimately resulted in my husband’s and my leaving our jobs and relocating on the Oregon Coast. I had begun to see “simplicity” as an important concept for me to learn in 1997, and the letter written on December 29 that year told the story of our selling real estate to purchase property in Oregon and my husband’s accepting a job which would entail a radical life-style change. Leaving a full-time teaching job, and cutting my retirement income in less-than-half, was a scary step for someone who values financial security like I do! In retrospect, I see that my New Year’s Resolution, though not voiced on New Year’s Eve 1996, was to Simplify. I began a process of cleaning files and closets, letting go of possessions and “shoulds,” and trying to focus on one thing at a time.

Another major focus for me in 1997 had been to create more balance in my life. Years before I had expressed this concern to my brother. He spent days at yard sales and second-hand shops and finally found a somewhat dilapidated brass balance scale which now holds a place of honor in our living room. I finally leveled the two sides of the scale a few weeks ago when I realized the image I wanted to hold in my mind was one of true balance, even though my “artistic sense” likes it better when the two sides are asymmetrical!

So I now realize that my Resolutions in Retrospect that I saw at the end of last year were Simplicity, Balance and Focus. Early in the year I had become aware of the paradoxical nature of the attributes I was trying to cultivate. How does one maintain “balance” when trying to “focus” energy in a single direction? It’s certainly not “simple”! Recovery, Celebration, Simplicity, Balance, and Focus continue to be learned and relearned because, as with all lessons which are truly assimilated in life, the process is recursive: Lessons learned at a superficial level are deepened and become more profound as they are applied to new situations. Self-Knowledge is a life-long spiral.

Tomorrow is New Year’s Eve 1998 and this morning I realized that this year has been all about Reflection. I have spent a great deal of time this year looking back over my life as a wife, single mother, teacher, wife again – and now an “early retiree” and have begun to see some interesting patterns. Recently a friend introduced me to the Enneagram, an ancient model for categorizing nine basic types of people. According to the personality inventory in *The Enneagram Made Easy* by Renee Baron and Elizabeth Wagele, I am a #3, The Achiever. The characteristics I identify with most closely are that the achiever is always goal directed, is unable to relax for fear of “wasting time,” and possesses a deep sense of constantly being evaluated by others. Noel Coward, another Achiever, is quoted as having said, “Work is more fun than fun.” I have known for some time that silence, meditation, and reflection are difficult for me. Recently, however, I have realized that by not consciously developing these skills, I have overwhelmed myself to the point of exhaustion.

Afraid that someone might think that I have “really” retired, I keep people informed of current goals. Far be it that anyone might think I am lazy or wasting time! Since one of these current goals is a certification to teach workshops in how the brain processes information, I find it interesting that one of the key concepts in brain-compatible learning is to provide time for *reflection*.

So, 1999 will be my personal “Year for Reflection”! Will I get anything done? Certainly! I am still an “Achiever,” becoming more self-aware as I learn about Recovery, Celebration, Simplicity, and Balance and Focus. But it seems fitting that, during the last year of the millennium, I should take time to reflect upon the past 50+ years of life, 30+ years of teaching, 26+ years of parenting, 13 years as a single mom, and 13 + 6 years of marriage. Then perhaps I will have the energy to decide the direction I need to travel in the year 2000!

Bette Moore - Dec. 30, 1998