

Faith Matters & Resolution Matters

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BY REV. CHRISTINE LESLIE

I have always been intrigued by our culture's fascination with starting a new year. I have never been one to make New Year's resolutions and am always curious about the fuss we make over this. Since we can resolve to change our ways just about anytime we need to, we don't really need an holiday to prompt our resolve towards healthier and wiser ways of living.

This is not to say that I don't enjoy or appreciate the annual ritual we have created to help us consider the changes we need to make in our lives. Experience has, however, taught me that most of us don't really resolve to change our ways unless we have some very compelling reason to change. Celebrating the end of one calendar year and the start of another is fun but minimally motivating if we are honest with ourselves. For example, two years ago I was told I have degenerating discs in my lower spine and that this condition would eventually require surgery without certain, immediate changes in my behavior. These changes included trading in my stick-shift Jeep Cherokee, Georgia, for an automatic. This was not hard to do and I have enjoyed driving my automatic Jeep just as much if not more than driving Georgia. Besides, Red Dog has four doors and 4-wheel drive. Georgia had neither!

I was also told that were I to drink more water and walk every day for 45 minutes to an hour I would slow down the degenerating process considerably and live virtually pain free. Getting a different car and drinking more water has been the easy part. Integrating walking into my life on a daily basis has, however, been one of the biggest resolutions I have ever had to make and keep.

Getting my dog, Clancy, on January 8, 1996 has been the key to my success as a walker. Little did I know at the time what else was going to be resolved as a result of getting Clancy and walking everyday since

When I was 12 years old my parents finally gave into my pleas for a puppy of my own. So in January of 1964 my folks took my sister and me to the local humane society where we picked out Pepper, a beagle puppy. Pepper was the center of my universe and made me laugh, till I cried when he pulled toy ducks on a string around the house that quacked as he strutted. He loved popcorn and did not win points with my Mom when he ate her Rhubarb pie cooling just out of the oven.

Then the unimaginable happened one beautiful Sunday afternoon in the spring when Pepper was only 6 months old. My sister and I went outside to fly our kites and forgot to keep an eye on Pepper. I can see the driver of the truck in my mind's eye to this day who walked over to me and said, "Is that your puppy?" as he pointed to the road. I ran to where he pointed and was met with seeing the puppy I loved more than life itself lying still with no more breath moving his ribs up and down. I ran to our house and sobbed to my Dad, "Pepper has been hit. Pepper has been hit."

My Dad got a box, a towel, and a shovel and came with me to the road where he gently picked up Pepper in the towel and put him in the box. All he could say to me when I asked, "Is Pepper dead, Daddy?" was a choked up, "Yes, Honey, he is." We went to the back of our yard and buried my puppy at the base of a old walnut tree. I stood there in utter disbelief, confusion, and wanted desperately to stop what was happening. I was not able to love another puppy for 32 years....not until my need to walk everyday forced the issue.

I knew I would never walk on any kind of regular basis unless I had a daily, compelling reason to walk. So Martha and I checked the paper and went to the NJ Animal

Coalition's pet adoption day on January 8, 1996. We brought Clancy home and his need to walk became my reason to walk. What I did not know was how much my heart needed to be rehabilitated, too. Not long after Clancy and I began our daily walks around our neighborhood, I realized that I had kept my great love and affection for dogs, myself, and other people at arms length for 32 years all as a result of Pepper's death that spring day in 1964.

I honestly did not know that my decision to get a dog to walk with in 1996 was also going to help me resolve a barrier that had kept me from loving wholeheartedly for most of my life. In fact, deciding to find Clancy and bring him home probably had more to do with my need to learn how to risk loving wholeheartedly again than it did my need to walk everyday to stave off surgery. When I look back on it all I am grateful that something finally gave me the opportunity to resolve the grief I had carried all those years that had kept me from loving as fully and freely as I am capable of doing, which is how I loved Pepper.

In this season of newness when we ponder making resolutions to change our ways for the better, may each of us be more open to those avenues of resolution we least expect and maybe need the most. By doing this perhaps we will deepen our understanding of just how much faith matters and resolution matters. Martha and I send you our warmest wishes for a very happy and healthy new year.

Rev. Christine Leslie, the first openly ordained lesbian in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), is founder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center For Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development near Burlington, VT. Rev. Leslie is available for individual and couple counseling, workshops, retreats, and commitment ceremonies. Reach Rev. Leslie by visiting her web page for Triangle Ministries at: <http://members.aol.com/revcsl>, email her at revcsl@aol.com, or call her at 802-860-7106.

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