



SHARON VIRTIS

Winter Musings



New Year, New Thinking

As I rang in 2023 in the Florida Keys, I made an oath to take everything that comes my way this year with positive attitude. And for good reason! The news over the past year has been filled with so much negativity and uncertainty--war in Europe, civil unrest here at home, inflation and shortages of this or that--the list is long. Well, I, for one, have had enough of all this "doom and gloom". It's time for positivity!

"Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

—Abraham Lincoln

At the beginning of a new year, many of us make resolutions and set new goals for ourselves. Everything from losing weight and getting healthy to starting a new venture or a new family. In January, we begin our journeys toward these goals with enthusiasm. But often, the fates throw us a curveball. And the path to that "new you" becomes obstructed by something unexpected. When we don't see the results that we hoped for, we stress and become overwhelmed. Finding fault with ourselves and the world around us, we simply cannot hold onto a positive outlook.

So how do we remain positive so that we can stay focused on our goals? Here are some tips that have worked for me in the past when I've found myself in a funk and

that I've started again this year. And even though it's already February, there's no reason not to make a fresh start now.

1. Start the day with journaling. Each morning when I wake up, I take 10 minutes to write down whatever floats into my head. Every worry, every thought. It's a way to clear out all the junk and to start the day fresh.
2. Take a walk. I take a twenty to thirty minute walk every day (usually with the dogs), using the time to focus on all the good stuff in my life, to reaffirm my goals and to formulate my plans.
3. Limit screen time. Make a conscious decision to reduce the amount of time you are on your phone or in front of a screen. My goal this year is to only allow 30 minutes of social media and no more than 60 minutes of news each day. That's still an hour and a half out of my schedule. And if I find the news too depressing, I might just turn it off altogether!
4. Find happiness in the "Here and Now". When I was in my thirties, I often found myself stressing out about the uncertainty of the future. My mind was cluttered with so many worries and "what ifs?" that I couldn't think about anything else. My counter to this thinking is to remind myself to find happiness in the "here and now", and to force myself into the present. I ask myself "what gives me joy right now?" and then redirect my thoughts.
5. Create a Happiness Log. At the end of each day, I write down in my journal anything that put a smile on my face that day. Was it that long hug from my son? Or that phone call I got from my brother? Maybe it was watching the birds at the feeder. Or that little piece of chocolate that I snuck after dinner. I find that if I write down what made me happy, it inspires me to find more reasons to smile the next day. And I'm more grateful and mindful of life's small pleasures.

Wishing you all a happy (and positive) 2023!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jana', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



VEIL OF DOUBT

Coming October 10, 2023!

VEIL OF DOUBT

Based on a shocking true story, Veil of Doubt is part true-crime thriller, part medical and legal procedural, and all historical fiction. Widowed Emily Lloyd is accused of poisoning her three-year-old daughter Maud. It isn't the first death in her home: her husband and three other children all died of mysterious illnesses, so when Maud succumbs to an unexplained malady, the town suspects foul play.

Enter Powell Harrison, a soft-spoken, brilliant attorney who only recently returned to his Virginia hometown. Approached to assist in Mrs. Lloyd's defense, Harrison initially declines, worried that an infanticide case might tarnish their family's reputation. But as details about the widow's erratic behavior, her reclusive

neighbors, and the attending doctor emerge, Harrison begins to suspect that an even more sinister truth might lurk beneath the family's horrible fate.



WINTER READING

Winter is a fantastic time to read those books you've been meaning to start (or to finish!). Here are a few that were recommended last winter that I wanted to share.

Autobiography

Walden by Henry David Thoreau (1854): Memoir with vivid descriptions of the season in the chapter "The Pond in Winter"

Poetry

Poem 311: It Sifts from Leaden Sieves by Emily Dickinson (c. 1862): Reflections on a snow-covered world

Biography, Nonfiction

The Worst Journey in the World by Apsley Cherry-Garrard (1922)

Memoirs from one of the survivors of Scott's doomed 1910 Antarctic expedition

Short story

Snow by Ted Hughes (c. 1956)

Story of a man stumbling through a landscape of snow after a plane crash

Fiction

Native Son by Richard Wright (1940)

Vivid descriptions of a hunted man in the cold

Winter's Bone by Daniel Woodrell (2007) Paints a frigid picture of the crime-riddled Ozarks. (This is one of my favorites!)

Science Fiction

The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin: Set on a planet called Winter. What if there were no summer?

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep."
— *Robert Frost*

Recipes for Reading

Keto Peanut Butter Cookies

What could be better than a warm cookie on a cold afternoon? A guilt-free peanut butter cookie! Here's a quick and easy Keto friendly recipe:

- 3/4 cup unsweetened (natural) peanut butter
- 1/4 cup Truvia brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons almond flour
- 1 tsp vanilla



Mix all ingredients together in bowl. Scoop dough and shape into 12 balls. Place balls on greased baking sheet and flatten with fork. Bake 12 minutes at 350F. Cool for 10 minutes before removing. Each cookie contains 100 calories, 5g protein, 9g fat, and 4 carbohydrates (but only 1 net carb). Grab a cup of hot tea, a good book and enjoy!

Finding Your Creativity Again

One of the best things to do when you are in a creative funk is to try your hand at something else. No better way to jumpstart your motivation and get those creative juices flowing! Just after New Year's, I was in an abysmal funk. I couldn't write a thing! So I picked up the palette knife, hit the studio, and started painting again. And in no time, I was lifted from whatever was holding me back. Try it! You'll be amazed at how quickly you regain your mojo!



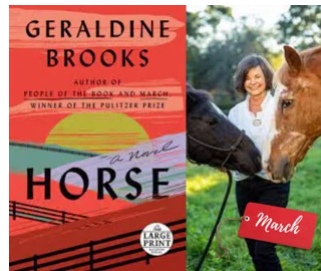
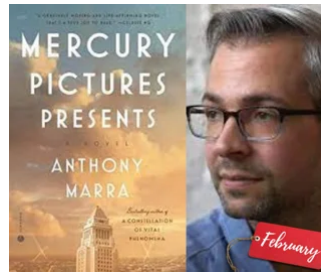
“Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life.”
– Pablo Picasso



#READWITHSHARON

Get ready for an awesome line up of fabulous books in my #ReadWithSharon book club. In addition to fabulous selections, author **Anthony Marra** and

Barbara Kingsolver will be joining us to discuss the inspiration behind their stories with our group! Not a member of the book club? Sign up for free [HERE!](#)



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