

Two Thousand and What?

By Jim Turner

"New Year's Eve is like every other night; there is no pause in the march of the universe, no breathless moment of silence among created things that the passage of another 12 months may be noted; and yet no man has quite the same thoughts this evening that come with the coming of darkness on other nights." Hamilton Wright Mabie, 1846-1916, was a quotable American essayist, lecturer and critic who earned multiple degrees, including an LLD from Columbia Law School. The above thoughts on the New Year are his.

In Pine Knoll Shores, the New Year's Eve partygoers yelled, "Happy New Year." Then we all made unpleasant noises with trinkets designed for making annoying sounds. Everybody kissed somebody and exchanged best wishes for the arrival of the new Diaper-Dandy. The year 2017 was officially underway, and I'm still looking around for 2016. Where did it go? I wasn't quite through with it. I had big plans for the old year and had set ambitious goals, yet somewhere along the way the pole got greased and the brass ring just kept slipping away.

A lot of stuff happened in 2016. Some of it was good; some of it was not so good. Some of it was unbelievably bad. I did not, I repeat, did not win the lottery. Actually, the lottery fancy was more of a cross-my-fingers and spit-in-my-hand kind of plan and not really a goal. Also, I did not open my door and find the Publishers Clearing House crew with their cameras, the flowers and my giant check. After faithful participation for nearly 47 years, it is probably time to abandon that idea from consideration as something to look forward to in 2017. I do understand that this little stand-off between me and PCH exemplifies the classic definition of insanity. I do the same thing over and over each year while expecting a different result. But my stubborn self tells me I'm not insane, just a little loopy.

A lot of pretty cool people passed away last year and left us with some level of sadness. See how many of these names you remember: Arnold Palmer, Janet Reno, Natalie Cole, Harper Lee, David Bowie, Otis Clay, Pat Conroy, Frank Sinatra Jr., Prince, Muhammad Ali, Gene Wilder, Garry Shandling, Merle Haggard, John Glenn and The Lady Chablis. Shame on you if at least 12 of these 15 folks do not have some special meaning for you. Unfortunately, too many dirt bags cheated the Grim Reaper and remain on the planet to use up perfectly good oxygen. I could recite a few of these names, but they would likely end up on the editor's floor, and rightfully so. Besides, the world will continue to spin until it doesn't, regardless of my opinion. Multiple deep breaths help.

The climate is still changing, and, fortunately for non-believers, we live on an island where sand is abundant and where heads can easily be buried to hide from reality. If you take a walk along the shore, you might find a variety of brand labels attached to bottoms of jeans and aimed at the sun.

Advertising for the Christmas gift-buying season started soon after Labor Day in 2016, and the holiday music began blaring in department stores and on radio stations. That devil song that gets in my head every year around Thanksgiving, the one about Grandma's unfortunate experience with Santa's reindeer, hardly had a chance to earn a scream from me before Florence Henderson died and a different tune attached itself to my brain. Florence, as you surely remember, was the singer/actress who played the role of Carol Brady in the TV series "The Brady Bunch." The series aired from 1969 until 1974 and told the story of a blended family and their daily adventures. The theme song began with these words:

Here's the story of a lovely lady
Who was bringing up three very lovely girls.
All of them had hair of gold, like their mother,
The youngest one in curls.

So there. Now the music is yours to hold in your head. I give it away to you. Take it, please. Take it even if you don't please. Just get it out of my head. I want Grandma back. I forgive Grandma for drinking too much eggnog and walking when the "do-not-walk" sign was blinking. I do not forgive Florence for dying and allowing the 24-hour news stations to blare her theme music every five minutes for two weeks. Bad Florence.

The year 2016 gave us some pretty scary stuff like the Zika virus and Hurricane Matthew. Britain exited the EU and the world learned of North Korea's fifth nuclear test, its most powerful explosion yet. There were some attention-grabbing events as well—activities that appealed to our lighter side. For example, in January San Francisco hosted the Cheesemonger Invitational. There was no admission charge for Pied Pipers. Some folks described it as a cheesy affair while others found it tasteful. From March through October the Lantern Festival toured the country and lighted up skies from coast to coast. Dover, Delaware, was host to the Firefly Music Festival in June. I broke the sixth string on my acoustic guitar so I was unable to participate. Maybe next year I will be better prepared for the performance. In July 2016 San Diego offered us the adventure of Comic-Con. This festival featured characters from favorite movies, comic books and shows. Glad I didn't make this one 'cause Wonder Woman wasn't there.

One should never give up on Texas. Not to be outdone by other states, the Lone Star State provided us with the Texas Renaissance Festival. This dandy featured jousting knights all duded-up in colorful outfits and wielding fancy lances suitable for removing opponents from their mighty steeds. Contestants could be transported immediately from the arena to the funeral parlor next door. Each had signed a disclaimer prior to the competition and acknowledged their desire to be buried in their boots and bloody knight outfit. As you might expect from Texas, in accordance with current Texas state law, the jousting were permitted to wear their six-shooters on their hips. In the event the lances broke during the fight, all was not lost as the trusty 45 could finish the job. Finally, in November Las Vegas sported the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon.

Of course you probably knew about all these happenings long before they occurred and maybe even brought back a tee shirt or two. Not me, though. I spent much of the year searching for the remains of 2015. Brooks Atkinson wrote, "Drop the last year into the silent limbo of the past. Let it go, for it was imperfect, and thank God that it can go." Was he speaking to me?



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