

Welcome to our tenth anniversary edition of *Lowcountry Weekly*. Ahem, I mean *The Lowcountry*.



That's right. We've gone and changed our name. Don't you hate when that happens? I do. In fact, I tend to resist change of any kind. (Nothing personal, President Obama.) I'm of the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" school. And *Lowcountry Weekly* wasn't... broke. But let's not talk finances. It's rude and tacky.

The truth is, though my team has dragged me "kicking and screaming" (my default mode, according to my husband) into this New Look, New Name thing, I'm pretty excited about it, now. Perhaps the most exciting change, for me anyway, is that I no longer have to do the layout. What? You never knew I did the layout? You thought I was merely the resident word girl? Well... that's how it was *supposed* to be, all those many years ago (about 8.5, to be exact) when my brand new bridegroom Jeff and I made the wildly impetuous (and slightly insane) decision to purchase *Lowcountry Weekly* from its founding publisher, my then-boss,

Debbie Hoffman.

(Incidentally, Debbie has recently returned to The Lowcountry as our Director of Sales & Marketing. So technically, I suppose, I am now *her*

boss, but we're refreshingly vague about matters of hierarchy around here.)

Anyway, when we bought the paper, it came with a part-time graphic designer... who promptly quit on us within the first few months, leaving us high and dry one day... at deadline. (Dry, that is, unless you count my tears... and all those glasses of wine I downed). Jeff and I still remember those three days when we were forced to teach ourselves PageMaker as The Weekend from Hell.

But after a while, I got the hang of doing layout, and since I *could* – and could for free – I did. I never got great, or even very good, but I got 'er done, as they say. Still, it was always time away from my true love – the words. I am absolutely thrilled that we've handed over the design of our paper to the lovely and talented

Lydia Inglett,

for whom such work is both her passion and her gift... so I can get back to mine.

And speaking of my love of wordcraft... in case you hadn't noticed, we actually have a staff writer, now, and he's exceptional. **Mark Shaffer** came to us out of the proverbial blue, bringing his fierce talent, his nose for a good story, and a ton of experience. Over more than three decades, he's produced, anchored and written for radio, print, television and the web, covering serial killers, hurricanes, the statehouse and everything in between. In a few short months, Mark has staked out a big chunk of this publication, creating popular recurring features, including "The Moveable Feast" and "The Backyard Tourist." The kid's got a future... and I hope it's with us.

And, of course, Mark's not the only one churning out great copy around here. From the

beginning, *The Lowcountry* has been blessed with a group of terrific local columnists... many of whom do it “just for fun.” It’s been my joy and my privilege to watch each of them grow into the role of “Opinionator,” even as I did the same. In a media-scape of ever-increasing snarkiness and anger, I’ve tried to cultivate a tone civility and thoughtfulness here at

The Lowcountry,

though some of my contributors really keep me on my toes (Hi,

Campbell

!). You’ll be happy to know that all your favorites are still with us –

Bernie, Laura, Vivian, Jim, Debbi,

et. al. – and we’ll continue to publish guest columnists and feature writers, as well.

Our sales staff – the ones who make it all possible! – has grown since the early days.

Considerably. In fact, there were plenty of times – plenty – when we had *no* sales staff. Since Jeff and I both lack anything resembling the Sales Gene, these were not the best of times.

Thank goodness

De

bbie Hoffman

has returned to us! The woman is a brilliant marketing strategist and a fearless “closer.” (I, on the other hand, get nauseous just typing that word.) If you see Debbie coming, and you don’t want to buy advertising... run. The same goes for her dynamic cohorts,

Christina Byrne

and

Dawn Payne.

All these women are exceedingly charming and darn good at what they do. You won’t know what hit you till you’re signing on the dotted line. The whip-smart and almost freakishly efficient

Stephanie Bashaw

has also joined our team as production manager and all around organizational czar. Boy, did we need her!

So, we have a new name, a new look, new features, and some great new team members. But perhaps the most striking evidence – for me, anyway – that *The Lowcountry* is “all grown up” is the fact that I have finally been relieved – after eight plus years – of my little red wagon. For eight plus years, I hauled that wagon – a classic Radio Flyer – around the streets of downtown Beaufort, delivering

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to our outdoor racks and any merchant kind enough to let us put them in his establishment. It was supposed to be a temporary gig... kinda like the layout thing. And at first, it was... cute. A fun gimmick. A way of getting us noticed...

and

getting the paper out. But as I got older – and less cute – so did the job. When Jeff told me, a few months ago, that he’d finally hired someone to do the Beaufort delivery route, I was elated. Then I got a little sad, of course – that wagon and I had some good times together – but I got over it in short order.

As for this column...those of you who’ve been reading it since the beginning know that Rants & Raves – and its writer – have been through many changes over the past decade. I started out writing quick hits – basically dot journalism – about any ol’ thing that tickled my fancy. Movies I’d seen... books I’d read... a song I’d heard. Whatever. It was just for fun, and fun it was! I was a single girl, working part-time, wondering what the future held... but not wondering too hard. As my life has taken on depth and complexity – in the form of a husband, a business, a child, etc. –

so has my column. You readers have seen me through the joys and trials of pregnancy and motherhood... my hapless attempts at homemaking... my recurrent worries about our declining culture... my widely unpopular and (I think) misunderstood political shift... my joyous (but not always well-received) rediscovery of my Christian faith... and so much more. I have shared it all with you, for better or worse, *and you have let me*. Your loyal readership has been the gift of a lifetime. Thank you.

Kinda sounded like I was signing off there, didn't it? No such luck! I plan to be cranking this thing out well into my dotage. What else is a girl supposed to do with her free time?

From all of us here at *The Lowcountry*, thanks so much for your support over the past ten years. Here's to another wonderful decade in paradise.