Opinion
Spirituality



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by Mariam Williams

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November 28, 2018

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On Thanksgiving Day, my mother's car broke down on her way to pick me up from the gym. The event triggered all sorts of thoughts:

- I want to buy my mother a new car.
- I want to be in a position to take care of my parents. I thought I would be by now.
- How can I get into a position to take care of my parents?
- I should just be thankful they have their health. Isn't that the most important thing? Isn't that my standard for where I decide to live, to remain in a city I like more and that has more opportunities for me than home, for as long as my parents are healthy?
- How long can they remain healthy when they are poor?
- How long can I remain healthy when I am poor?
- I'm not poor. I don't worry about where rent will come from each month, and I never have. I've never been late with a rent check. But I feel the pinch now that I no longer receive food stamps. And I don't know what I'll do for health insurance now that I make too much for Medicaid but nowhere near enough for good, private health insurance.
- Which means you also don't make enough for a latte once a week or for salmon or the makeup primer you insist on wearing or for anything from the farmer's market, but you still buy it all.
- I'd starve without credit cards.
- I want to get out of debt.
- Remember when you thought a bachelor's degree would make you more competitive and launch you into higher echelons of income?
- Why didn't that museum hire me? I had a plan to be debt-free within four years.
- Just start offering online courses already.
- Just finish the online course you bought to show you how to launch your own online course already.
- I would, if I didn't have to grade papers, read and choreograph for the in-person classes I teach.
- I'm afraid the online course will bomb, and then what?
- My mother has missed house payments in the past.
- My mother hasn't held a full-time job since being laid off twice during the Great Recession.

- My mother has never had a good car. Except maybe the one I totaled when I was 17. That one probably would've lasted 250,000 miles. But this 1994 Buick Regal she bought from a neighbor for $400 loaned to her by her mother and brother? It broke down on Thanksgiving Day.
- I have to buy mom a car next year — new, zero miles, every problem covered under warranty.
- And your own 14-year-old car that can't pass state inspection and that multiple mechanics have warned you isn't worth fixing?
- Why does this keep happening to my mom?
- What happened to those church people God used to speak to, who would just push their car keys into another congregant's hand because they're sure that's what God told them to do? Why hasn't God told them to help my mom?
- She deserves better. I should be able to give her better. I should do better.
- Hey, we won't be in line at a food bank at Christmas. Our names won't be on the Salvation Army Angel Tree. We have our health. It's not that bad.

It's not that bad, but it is that complicated. I expected to be in a position to take care of my parents by now in part because I believe in a system of rewards for good behavior and consequences for bad. It's a fictional system, living somewhere with leprechauns and unicorns, but faith in God and God's promises — that is, what I believed God's promises to be — also nurtured it. Despite all evidence to the contrary, it's a belief I haven't yet been able to shake and that I'm not quite sure I want to, because of another thing dwelling there.

Within that system also lives hope, and hope is the reason not to give up, not to surrender sanity and life. Things can get better — personally and universally. I'm not sure how. I won't start a Go-Fund-Me page for my mom or for my student loans. (People probably already think I'm either lazy or delusional for the two crowdsourcing campaigns I've completed and one arts patron page I have. Also, have you, reader, ever thought about how outrageous it is that we need crowdsourcing at all?)

But I will finish my courses and try to start a successful one myself. I will keep working; keep writing between my other jobs; keep trying to find an agent who will represent me and my work well; keep in mind the possibility that more people than I know are reading my words; keep hoping the verses promising that the good works God starts in me, God completes. What is the use of living if I stop believing that?

[Mariam Williams is a Kentucky writer living in Philadelphia. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing and certificate in public history from Rutgers University-Camden. She is a contributor to the anthology *Faithfully Feminist* and blogs at MariamWilliams.com. Follow her on Twitter @missmariamw.]

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