

Be-Dazzled

By Sheila Johnson

In 2014, my family and I carried a mixed bag of ups and downs. We experienced a string of personal losses consisting of loved ones, living spaces, and jobs. Yet with each loss, every one of us was given new opportunities to see the world through clear lenses of hope. We were able to examine and appreciate those whose deaths preceded ours—revisiting old photos, telling stories of good times spent with them, and laughing at *all* of our idiosyncrasies. Two of us (including myself) found new living quarters that were and are perfect matches for our lifestyle needs and desires. One of us found an exciting and fulfilling job that came with perks for the family and values self-care. Another one of us became betrothed and later married the love of his life. One of my daughters was able to gain more flexibility on her job enabling her to raise her income. Lastly, I was able to fully retire and begin the process of discovering my inner self on a deeper level and fill my “bucket” list with dreams and ideas. To culminate this roller coaster of a year, we were all blessed to take a family vacation of a lifetime to Asia (a place I always wanted to travel to with my kids) at the end of December. While there, I reflected on 2014 and vowed that I would forever walk in gratitude for how God had brought us through the ups and downs and promised myself that I would step out of my “comfort zone” a little more often in 2015.

As custom would have it, I planned to attend the New Year’s Eve service at my Church and bring in the New Year with singing and praising. There was just one problem: I also really wanted to go to Dazzle Jazz and take in the show before going to Church service that began at 10pm. I kept my promise to myself and stepped completely out of my comfort zone. I found a parking spot right in front of the door; I was seated with a male gay couple who were very kind and welcoming to me as a single black female; I enjoyed a delicious meal and one drink; danced to the last song of the set; and waited for my tab. It never came. When I asked the waiter for my check, he explained that the couple who I shared the evening with, not only paid for all of my food and drink, but for any additional drinks I may have wanted. They left before I could thank them. Grateful and joyful, I headed toward the door, and the lead singer told me that she noticed how much I was enjoying the show. After a few minutes of conversation, all the band members gathered around me and we took pictures with my smart phone! Needless to say, after experiencing that night, I left be-Dazzled! I brought in the New Year of 2015 with heartfelt joy knowing that it was the Eve of a new beginning.