

A TELEPHONE CALL

by [Kelly J. Beard](#) | Nov 8, 2017



My cell phone rang a week ago Friday as I was navigating Atlanta’s notorious rush-hour traffic, trying to follow my daughter to a Target store near her home. She’s nesting. Her baby’s due in early March, and she feels a near-palpable urgency to move from the rat-and-roach infested duplex she shares with her boyfriend and two other near-feral millennials, to a tiny but rat-free bungalow with a fenced back yard. I looked at the number. Tennessee? I don’t know anyone in Tennessee. I almost didn’t answer. I was frazzled and tired.

This is Kelly. I answered in the voice of the lawyer I used to be. It’s not a friendly voice. It’s a voice for overbearing defense lawyers and telemarketers.

Mumble, mumble. A name.

And what can I do for you?

Mumble, mumble. Won. Mumble. Prize. Mumble call you back.

No, no, no. I’m sorry. I can’t hear very well.

I’m calling to say your manuscript won our First Book Award.

I pulled into the Target parking lot, apologizing profusely, and learned this news:

The manuscript of my memoir, *An Imperfect Rapture*, won the Zone 3 Press First Book Prize. It took me seven years to complete this manuscript. I’d hoped

and prayed it would find a home with a University or Indie Press, feeling certain the gatekeepers at mainstream presses would find my work irrelevant or mystifying. Zone 3 Press, the University Press of Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee, is a perfect home for my book. I'll write more about the editing process and how all this works (I haven't seen a contract or discussed details yet) as the process unfolds. For now, all I know is Janisse Ray was the judge, and the book's publication date is next fall. You're invited to my first reading. I'm told it will be at Austin Peay State University, and I'll have the honor to read with Janisse Ray.

One note about Janisse Ray. If you haven't read her work, start with her 1999 bestselling memoir, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*. The New York Times called Ray "the Rachel Carson of the South." I can't imagine anyone I'd feel more honored to have my work chosen by or to stand next to at a reading.

For more details about the prize, the runner up (a terrific essayist), and a number of talented finalists and semifinalists, please see the Zone 3 Press blog at <http://zone3press.com>.

I want to close this a snippet from *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*:

God doesn't like a clearcut. It makes his heart turn cold, makes him wince and wonder what went wrong with his creation, and sets him to thinking about what spoils the child.

You'd better be pretty sure that the cut is absolutely necessary and be at peace with it, so you can explain it to God, for it's fairly certain he's going to question your motives, want to know if your children are hungry and your oldest boy needs asthma medicine – whether you deserve forgiveness or if you're being greedy and heartless. You'd better pay good attention to the saw blade and the runners and the falling trees; when a forest is falling it's easy for God to determine to spank. Quid pro quo.

Don't ever look away or daydream and don't, no matter what, plan how you will spend your tree money while you are in among toppling trees.