

Turning 60

by Kelly J. Beard | Oct 16, 2017



I didn't think I'd be a blogger, and it may turn out I won't be. But today is my 60th birthday, and I feel the need to write about how it looks from here, at the precipice of my seventh decade, in this fraught, unraveling world. I'm not promising wit or wisdom. No polished essays in this space. Instead, I want to document this year – weekly, or monthly – to put on paper (or cyber-paper) moments of loss and gain, insight and occlusion. And I want to hear from you. No trolls. Just truth.

Three years ago, I enrolled in the MFA program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. At the time, I had a solo law practice and was working pretty much full time as an employment discrimination lawyer. I'd written stories and plays and poems since I was a kid. The longing to write had never left me. Even as the MFA experience sparked an endless curiosity about my own and others' interiorities, though, it seemed the world around me was contracting into a collective brittleness. I've lost three friends this year. Not to illness or death, but to social media and the increasingly hard lines taken by people who no longer have the patience to deal with others who don't precisely mirror their views.

In his essay, *"As Much Truth As One Can Bear,"* James Baldwin wrote, "In my mind, the effort to become a great writer simply involves attempting to tell as

much of the truth as one can bear, and then a little more." I intend to write this blog with that purpose in mind: to tell as much of the truth as I can bear. I expect to write about aging. Not simply how it feels to age or to become invisible in our youth-and-celebrity-soaked culture, but also how aging seems a spiritual practice. I want to write about depression, since she's been a fairly constant companion. I want to write about being the mother of a brilliant but mystifying millennial, and, in a little fewer than five months, I hope to be writing about being a first-time grandmother.

For today, the truth I can bear is this: we cannot afford to lose each other. We cannot afford to pretend that our actions are disconnected from our own or the planet's health. We cannot afford to see the world through our own eyes only, or to listen to voices that do nothing but echo our own. The paradoxical truth is that although we are each unique as snowflakes or stars, we are also connected and interconnected to each other and to every living creature on the planet.

Here's some truth in one of my favorite Rumi poems.

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.*

*He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*