

well and often. To commune with one another in something other than celebration of the cheap thrill of breathing.

Silence is not only unpleasant and dishonest. It's dangerous. Let us always be "trying to say."



My father lived Thoreau's trope – a life of quiet desperation. Only in its end and aftermath was Dad's existence loud.

We are and should be sound. Fury. I say preempt the echo.

On Celebrating a Birthday the Same Day as a New U.S. President is Inaugurated

HEIDI BEIERLE

A snowy mountain of whipped cream sparkling with sugar crystals stands firmly in a serving bowl, centerpiece for the waffle topping station in Timberline Lodge's dining room. I'm overnighting here on Mt. Hood with a good friend as part of my birthday celebration. I dig with a serving spoon three times into the mountain of cream, carving a chasm in its slope, and let the cream fall in dollops into my cup-sized bowl. I speckle the stiff peaks with mini chocolate chips.

Back at my sturdy wooden seat, I spoon small bites of the sweet cream and chocolate into my mouth. Face down on the table next to me, my phone buzzes with Facebook notifications. I don't want to look. I don't want to see posts about the catastrophe upon us because the new President is taking office, and I certainly don't want to see this invective tagged on with birthday greetings. With all the political chatter around me on Facebook, I feel judged. I wonder, *How can you possibly celebrate today?* Steering away from that seems like a hell of a good reason to not be on Facebook. Yet, I like happy birthday wishes.

The buttery cream melts over my tongue, and I crush the chocolate between my molars to scatter its bitterness, fat mingling with fat.

Fat. What a word. Fat. Fat. Fat.

No amount of repeating the word makes me feel any more comfortable with how it's used, even as I delight in its richness coating my tongue. As nutritional descriptor, it's judged and steeped in shame – good fat, bad fat. I turn my head as if that will protect me from the hurt unleashed from mentally mouthing this F-word.

Fat makes me uncomfortable – in my clothes, in my psyche, in front of the mirror, on my plate, in someone else's mouth. In this moment though, the birthday party is in my mouth. This bowl of whipped cream and chocolate isn't the only thing I've eaten for breakfast today, but I allowed myself this indulgence to mark my forty-second birthday. And I'm enjoying it despite myself, despite my country, and despite what feels like the world around me pressing in like a murder of crows.

I was born on January twentieth, although no U.S. President was inaugurated in 1975.

Born in the heart of winter, my birthday always has more darkness than light.

This last year has been fraught with personal challenges: divorce, losing my job, starting a business, breaking a bone, losing another job. I've wanted answers. Why am I the person these things happen to? Why are things so difficult? What am I supposed to be doing with my life?

On New Year's Day, I went to a morning yoga class. I wondered if going to class would help me feel better about the fat I accumulated over the fall and winter. And, if not feel better

accepting my fat, I guessed I would certainly feel better exercising to make it go away.

Special for New Year's Day, the teacher made *crème brûlée*, which she invited all the students to have. A cup of cream was the last thing I needed, but my belly was willing to receive this lesson.

"First, have some pickled ginger and turmeric," the teacher instructed, "to aid digestion. Then have the *crème brûlée*. The fat from the cream will fuel you to digest the rest of your meal."

I couldn't believe my ears. Even though she had also made brunch to share with us, she wanted us to have dessert first. Inside, I heard chanting as if my belly were at a rally: Dessert first! Dessert first! And then my mind took over. Would it fill me up? Would I want another?

I'd like to say I ate the entire thing mindfully, but I didn't. Within a minute, I sat with an empty ramekin in one hand and a spoon licked shiny in the other.

"It's ok to eat *crème brûlée* every day," the teacher said. Well, that's what I heard her say.

I traded my ramekin for a paper plate of lentils and rice and sat in an open chair next to a woman named Pat. We made small talk, during which I told her about the consulting business I had started and described my specialty area in active travel options. She wanted to know how I got interested in this career field.

It wasn't easy to answer. Whatever clarity I seemed to have gained in the last year to pursue this work perched on an iceberg of confusion.

Something I said prompted her to ask, "Is there a relationship involved?"

"Yes and no," I said. "I returned to yoga after nine years away to help recover from divorce. Crafting my work and discovering where to go with my life is part of the process."

"That might be where I'm headed," she said.

"Are you divorced?" I asked.

"I'm trying to sort that out," she said. "You seem like you know where you're going." She looked at me as if I could throw her a life preserver.

"I don't have any answers," I told her and then almost chortled, "except there are no answers." I put my hand on her arm. I hadn't expected how unnerving saying that would feel. While I thought the gesture was to reassure her, it seemed to be for me. I felt less scared in the face of Vast, Answerless Uncertainty by touching her. "Yoga helps," I said. "It gives me tools to find balance when I'm dying for an answer and there isn't one."

I spoon another bite of whipped cream into my mouth. The fat and sugar slither across my tongue. The administration change in the White House amplifies my awareness of the Unknown as I acknowledge it does for so many other people. I'm interested in what this dark specter of change has to teach me. Does it obscure truth or invite me to encounter it? If, like the fat I eat, I can accept the unseemly heaviness as part of who I am, will I taste liberty?

Election Results, By County

JEREMY CANTOR

The meanest boy on the playground
meandered in my general direction,
demonstrating just for me that he
was in no hurry, maintaining an eye-lock
so that I could not possibly mistake his intent,
so he could enjoy my fear to the fullest.
He was the boy who was famous for stealing
everybody's lunch money, and now that same everybody
was patting him on the back as they passed
with an "attaboy!" as he drew his switchblade
from his pocket, his eyes never leaving mine even
as he flicked it open and they all murmured what
a great guy he was and they would always
be right behind him because he had
promised to buy them lunch.