

Kendal at Oberlin
Author: Judi Bachrach

“BEGIN AGAIN”

January 1, 2021

A New Year for the Pandemic

Begin Again

The tick of a clock

the ring of a bell

the gasp and sigh of a ventilator

the mask on a face

zooming with colleagues

family and friends

listening breathing uncertainty

violence disbelief and fear

366 days to spin and slow dance

our way around the sun

only to arrive

at where we may begin again

The plunge of vaccinating needles

the need to be whole

new ways to love and work

together in

bearing such loss

taking responsibility

picking up the joyful burden

listening breathing creation

belief in helping healing learning

366 days to spin and slow dance

our way around the sun

only to arrive

at where we may begin again

3/22/21

Second Spring of the Pandemic Shutdown

I have been a grouchy bear this week. I felt the call of spring to emerge from my cave as usual but- the Assisted Living cave administrators are still bound to impose muzzling face masks, keep us inside the enclosed garden, and enforce that there be no interactions with any of the other bears living in their independent living caves, even though we have all been vaccinated. The rising sap has irritated me in ways I did not anticipate.

As I look towards July 4th weekend, which Biden bids us to celebrate as normally as possible, it reminds me that it marks the third anniversary of my coming to live at Kendal. The continued restrictions confine my memories and my heart hurts. Early spring used to mark the arrival of lambing season for our flock of 23 Icelandic sheep. It signaled the transformation of fluffy peeping chicks into feathered hens. It initiated yearly care for our horses, and the careful transplanting of indoor seedlings and direct seeding of flowers and vegetables into the gardens each according to their own temperature needs.

My connection to the seasons while working with the earth and tending to our animals is gone. Truthfully, my body had been failing long before I moved to Ohio, inhibiting my life as a homesteader. I was not aware of how much it all had grounded and nourished me until this restricted version of spring. My childhood and most of my adult life with my husband had been lived in the Catskill Mountains of New York and the Hudson River Valley. The Catskills are ancient, rounded mountains. The energy there stood firm beneath my feet. It was slow, measured,

and weighted with a gravitas that rose up through the forests as they also embodied the seasonal changes of the northeast. Northeast Ohio has a very different feel altogether.

Kendal was built mostly on wetlands requiring the creation of seven different ponds. Early settlers died from malaria in Cleveland area swamps. Our claylike soil is dotted with chunks of sandstone beneath the surface. The black bears that had regularly raided our garbage in the spring and fall, the weasels, foxes, and the wild turkeys that flowed in flocks across the mountainous plateaus of my past have now been succeeded by rabbits, muskrats, a few deer, and the always ubiquitous chipmunks and squirrels. I hear of raccoons and occasional skunks also showing up at private cottages. At Kendal there are many geese, ducks and elegant herons, (including a brief touchdown of trumpeter swans last week) nosily inhabiting their watery domains, serenaded by frogs and snapped at by turtles.

I have not yet had the opportunity to use my scooter around the campus (see grouchy bear above) and can only hope the new mandates will loosen up our restrictions by this summer. Meanwhile the sun resurrects new growth everywhere as Eastertide approaches. Hallelujah.

4/25/21

Molting Freedom

How do I engage with freedom that is stable, independent of outer circumstances? Outwardly, my life in the Care Center is shifting again. Now we can rejoin the larger community and though we are all vaccinated, we from the Care Center must wear masks and stay distanced at all times. To sit outside in the sun, chatting with a friend while looking at the pond in front of the main entry of Kendal with no one to escort or time me, was like being on vacation. I relaxed in ways I hadn't known I was missing. It has been very nourishing.

What is freedom? I wouldn't recognize this gift if I didn't already know it anchored deep inside of me. It is sacred, immovable, innate within us all. Gratitude for slow reintegration with my whole community is blooming along with the tulips.

Molting Goldfinch

I am shedding
my olive drab winter feathers
growing new ones of
aconite, forsythia, crocus, daffodil yellow
glistening in the spring sunshine
I dominate the bird feeder
propagate my species
crack open my sunflower seeds
while she delights in watching me
her seeds from a package
on top of her morning oatmeal

She is also molting
shedding gray prohibitions
of a pandemic
and growing new feathers
of golden hope
in trust for her species

7/27/21

A Reckoning

The first Kendal resident (who is living in the Care Center) just tested positive for COVID. The community is shocked and saddened. Thankfully, this person is already recovering. We had been so careful and so lucky. We are sobered. We slid back to stricter safety measures. We remember that vaccines are not 100% effective, that we produce fewer antibodies than the young, that the emerging variants are more contagious. I am restricted from

accessing the rest of Kendal again for two weeks. But I am also well cared for, safe. I am trying to get my arms around the ongoing nature of our long journey. I am calling on the wisdom of love, the strength of compassion.

Books of Reckoning

The gray fog of isolation swallowed you whole
weighed down by loneliness, severed by separation
arms and hands too disabled to reach out

Restrictions imposed on you slammed shut door after door
complaints erupted in helpless defiance of safety vs. freedom
the need to know whose facts justified those rules

You struggled to comprehend the sweep of what we lost
inspiring reinvention, rewiring, redesigning
seeking reconnections new and healthy
on top of still sturdy foundations

Despite these individual reactions inside of our community bubble
so far, not even one of us or those we gratefully employ
died from this still evolving virus

The days of reckoning our books, our health
find us in good standing *so far*
though it is not over, and we were never suffering alone

The world beyond lost millions- *Millions-*

over one million children orphaned

over half a million without grandparents

we all are orphaned by the loss of ideals, by kindness submerged in fearful hate

Losses-Losses-Losses

the entire World Body ravaged by a pandemic

reckoning results of ignorance and greed

that are not over

all is coming due... and yet

Look to our young and old hearts, shaped by this same sere crisis

unfold into the future

nothing is foretold

all is in the telling

May we be held accountable

May we be sustained through clear vision and nurturing

an abundance of true stories reckoned worthy to be told

around new hearths

for generations upon generations

The above are all 2021 excerpts from my blog: judibwriting.wordpress.com Thank you for the opportunity to share. Judi Bachrach