

Botox and My Best Friend

Botox, Babies, Birthdays, and my Best Friend

It's my best friend's 50th birthday next month. My goodness, when did she get so old? (What I am really saying is when did I get so old?) Since we are not the same age—I am seven years her junior—I have a few years till my big 5-0, but the fact that she's getting older means I am, too. And who wants to get older? Especially when the proverbial best age is "in your 30s"—wise, but "still young." But I hear things are a changin'. Pitbull sings: "40s the new 30," and society keeps telling us 50s the new 40, the 60s the new 50, and so on. But my best friend said something a few years ago that I will never forget. She said: "Kim, you don't need to look like you are in your thirties; you just need to look like a *good 40*." So I am debunking the previous adage—I am not the "new 30"—I am a good forty-two-year-old. And *good* meaning of healthy mind, body, and heart; a woman who dresses age-appropriately and cares about her appearance, but not to the point of obsession. Simply put, I am no longer trying to live in another decade.

And you know what else? My best friend, Bettina, and I like getting older. Of course, we don't like the bags under the eyes, the extra belly roll, the midday slumps, the onset of peri-menopause when hot flashes turn into cantankerous moods. But we appreciate our respective ages because one saying is true: "with age comes wisdom." Certainly Bettina and I have made mistakes, and are far from perfect. Bettina is set in her ways (a single, professional woman with no children) and I am, too (also a professional woman, married with no children); we are both stubborn, at times unforgiving, and don't bend easily. I can't help but wonder if the fact that we don't have children has made us this way. Would children have stabilized us? Made us less worried about our two fruit, two protein, and two fiber servings a day? Made us less concerned about our spotless sinks, our upcoming deadlines? I don't know. I don't think so. We both made choices that suit our lifestyles and our personal goals. I think Bettina has found some "stabilization" with her genuine concern for our country's children and future. She volunteered, years ago, for the Barbara Boxer campaign and, most recently, for Obama's. She is a Big Sister, worked for several years with Literacy Partners, and lately has devoted a lot of time to First Book Brooklyn. I, on the other hand, have been less involved with national or global change, but have dedicated twenty years of my life to teaching and individual students. So though my best friend is invested in the larger community and has admirably done a lot of good in this world, I can't help wonder as we both age: who will hold my best friend's hand as she grows weaker and eats alone in her 475 square foot Brooklyn apartment?

I just read a fantastic, short novel called *The Imperfectionist* by Tom Rachman wherein he creates a unique character named Gerda Erzberger who deals with issues such as these. On her death bed, she gives a final interview to a man who will write her obituary: " 'No children, never a husband. I reach this stage of my life, Mr. Gopal, with the most comical realization: that the only legacy is genetic material. I always disdained those who made children. It was the escape of the mediocre, to substitute their own blotched lives with fresh ones. Yet today I rather wish I'd borne a life myself' " (38). Though our views on children are not so dogmatic, I often contemplate our choices. I have explored these ideas extensively in my novel *Red Greek Tomatoes* and always seem to come to the same conclusion: I love my life. Thank you first wave, second wave, Gloria, and third wave feminists who have worked hard and have given me Choices. Just like the protagonist of my novel says: "I may sound selfish, but I also think my choices are selfless because I know my choice will also—undoubtedly—have consequences." Bettina and I will not have a child to hold our hands, but that child will also not be burdened with an aging parent. Or as Nicole Krauss writes in her novel *Great House*, "No matter how vigilant, in the end a mother can't protect her child—not from pain, or horror, or the nightmare of violence"; it is with these words that I reaffirm my decision: parenthood is not for me (270). And with two nieces, who I adore more than anything, my worry monitor is already maxed out.

So Bettina and I have made choices. Two different women, with different lives, making different choices. Choices that we live with every day. One thing we have in common is we will not leave "our genetic material" behind. That we have controlled. But we have little control as our body gets more flaccid and our faces more wrinkled with each passing year. We can't keep our skin taut, our boobies perky; we can't control the gravitational pull of our derrières, our bones from cracking. When I look in the mirror, I do not see a 30something-year-old woman, but a woman in her forties. And I am more than okay with that.

I have learned a lot from my best friend over the years, and I hope I can share a few of these pearls of wisdom with you today. None of this is new or earth-shattering, but I think it's always good to hear again:

- It's okay to disagree with your best friend—just don't hold grudges. Always responding politely lacks depth and doesn't allow for growth and change.
- Embrace your real age! Eat well, get a bit of exercise, don't smoke, and keep your mind engaged. Wear a good moisturizer, and always wear sunscreen (even in the winter!)
- If you want Botox or plastic surgery or the other zillion things that are out there on the market, it's your choice (of course, as long as you have the time, the money, and are willing to take some risks). *But* if you choose to grow old(er) naturally, don't beat yourself up ever time you look in the mirror! (And just for the record, I am not against plastic surgery and have not ruled it out for the future, but am currently trying to learn to be happy "in my own skin.")

As I get older and practice the aforementioned, I am reminded once more that our body is the temple for a beautiful mind and heart. And I am grateful to have found those in a twenty-five year friendship with my best friend, Bettina.

So, happy birthday bff and—just so you know—I'll be there to hold your hand.