

# Still Not Dead Yet

*by Kathy Martone*

As featured in an anthology of writings on the process of aging :

[Still Not Dead Yet 2](#)

published by *Cahaba Press*

Standing in front of the full-length mirror, I stare at the image looking back at me. Who is she, I often ask myself. This older woman with graying hair, wrinkles around her eyes, parchment paper-thin skin, old age spots. And yet, she looks oddly familiar, this unedited version of myself. I decide I don't like her and try to banish her from my life. But she is persistent and returns every time I look in the mirror. Make-up, youthful clothing, and hair dye both seem to move her to the corners of my eyes where I don't have to look at her square on. This has worked for several years but now she has invaded my inner space, talking to me from inside my head. There is no escape, it seems. I feel trapped. Nowhere to go. Nowhere to hide. Destiny is in control.

As I begrudgingly accept her presence – this uninvited and unwanted caricature of myself – I am pleasantly surprised to discover how much I enjoy her company. Often witty and humorous, serious and introspective, she lays out the contradictory puzzle pieces of the map of my life, her ongoing narrative providing depth and wisdom to the flat contours of my memory. She speaks to me of a life lived and another life to come. She reminds me that there is much more to this human existence than I ever considered, inviting me into a dance of understanding and wisdom, a song of pain and beauty, all intertwined around a central axis of soul fiber – the true source of human nourishment, she explains.

And so, I sit myself down in front of this reflection and ask her permission to speak. Silently nodding, her upturned mouth and twinkling eyes signaling her assent, we begin crafting our relationship – a relationship that will survive beyond eternity. My teacher, my Self. The unfolding of the chrysalis of enlightenment, nourished in the womb of silent introspection.

We begin our wordless dialogue, this Other and Myself. Telepathically, I complain about her intrusion into my life. “I don't like being invisible,” I begin. “I want to be seen and recognized,

understood and valued. When I walk into a room, no one pays any attention, whereas when I was young and beautiful, heads always turned whenever I entered a room. I miss the power of physical attraction,” I finish with a sigh.

Almost hidden behind folds of skin that inhabit her orbits, her eyes widen with mirth and undeniable interest as she moves closer to me. “Why, my dear,” she clucks thoughtfully. “You’re describing the state of emptiness and humility that accompanies spiritual evolution. Why would you bemoan such gems of transcendence? This is what we’re all after in this life journey, is it not? Our time is better spent exploring the invisible realms not complaining about them!”

Gulping down feelings of shame and embarrassment at not having understood this obvious truth, I bow my head and try to gather my thoughts. Memories of my childhood begin to flood my mind/body system – a tsunami of images, thoughts and emotions swirling and crashing along the fault lines of old scars and threatening to reopen ancient wounds. My eyes begin to well with tears. “Why is my life still so difficult?” I almost yell at her. “I thought life was supposed to get easier! My childhood was hell but this is not much better. My body talks to me constantly – which is really annoying – and demands so much of my attention. As you know, I have always been anxious but now there is so much more to worry about – like having enough health insurance to pay for all the necessary maintenance for this bag of bones. And what will happen to me if I should fall and break a piece of this fragile skeleton? I feel so fucking vulnerable and everything is harder than it used to be. Wasn’t I supposed to be feeling stronger as I age? No one prepared me for this and I’m not happy about it, let me tell you!”

The old woman in the mirror stares at me, unblinking. Soon a tear slowly cascades down the hills and valleys of her wrinkled and sagging face. Now I’m really ashamed of myself. I didn’t mean to upset her. But I keep quiet, holding my breath and hoping for more pearls of wisdom. Standing shakily on spindly legs and grasping her walking cane with her gnarled fist, she turns and inches away from the glass, disappearing from my view. Where could she have gone, I wonder. Soon, the sound of distant music makes its way to my ears – the soft strains of a flute and a violin floating gently in the air and wrapping itself around me like a cocoon of remembrance. But remembrance of what? Surrendering to the magic of the calming melody, I close my eyes only to jerk them open again as I shield my eyes from the bright white light that floods me. Out of the luminous glow comes a voice – the now familiar inflection of my elder

self. “Do you remember now, my Sweet One?” her words ring in my ear. “Do you remember who you really are? For, without the crucible of pain and suffering, without the burning away of all things mortal, you would never recall that, at your core, you are a Being of Light. Everything else is irrelevant. This envelope of skin and bones is simply a distraction and inhibits us from the knowledge of our true essence. Yes, life is painful for everyone. And I grieve with you the intensity of such suffering but remember, there is always a reason. You’re being called to remember that you are more than flesh and bone, you are much more than you ever thought you were. And bless the fires that have purified you!” As the music fades away, so does the light. The reflection of my wise elder stares back at me, a beatific smile radiating from her holy face.

“But why does it have to be so hard?” I blurt out without thinking. Slapping my hands over my mouth, I hope she has not heard my careless utterance.

“It really doesn’t have to be,” she whispers, her words like thin sheets of parchment paper blowing in the wind. “Remembering is often the key to release. Remembering the trajectory of your past with its joys and its pain, its suffering and its delights, will help you to navigate more easily the path of your present and that of your future. But you must season your remembrance with the sweetness of compassion and self-love. Sprinkle liberally with that awareness that only comes from years of experience.”

Covering my face with my hands, I pull my focus inward, searching and seeking, always looking for the elusive answers to the meaning of my life. Peeking through my splayed fingers, I’m amused to see the Crone, hands covering her own face, eyes forward, staring back at me. I chuckle; she echoes. Pulling her hands down from her face, she looks at me questioningly. “I just.....I just really hate it....I don’t understand why I’m still struggling with the same issues that plagued me when I was younger. Wasn’t I supposed to evolve? I mean, I’ve spent most of my life seeking consciousness and self-understanding. I immersed myself in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and made a 6 week pilgrimage to Tibet. I’m still in therapy and meditate regularly. But I seem to be standing in the exact same spot with the exact same challenges. What gives?”

“Spiritual and psychological transformation take time, often many life times,” she replies. “It’s a process, not a product. From where I stand, it seems to me that the only thing missing from your profound journey is empathy for yourself. Humans never thrive unless they are seen for who they truly are – Light Beings repeatedly caught in the struggle to emerge from the restrictive

human experience. You would do well to enlarge your perspective and excise the judgment. And now, I'm getting tired. Shall we take just one more question before I retire?"

Breathing deeply to collect my thoughts and prepare the query I have purposely left for last, I gaze lovingly into the eyes of my new spiritual friend. "So, what about death?" I ask.

"What about it?" she shoots back with a thin smile creasing her thin lips.

"Well, uh, I was just thinking," I begin haltingly. "My mortality is always lurking around the edges, reminding me that my time is short. And – I have so many things I still want to do with my life. I'm curious about death and yet, also afraid of being in pain, afraid of being afraid. I'm just not ready..." My voice trails off.

"So, with all those past life memories you've excavated – soul journeys, if you will – you don't trust that death is a welcome doorway into another dimension, another life experience? A chance to further the work you have only just begun in this life? Death is not an ending, just another beginning – and one that you've experienced before. You survived death in the past and you'll survive it yet again. Remember. Its always about perspective – seeing the future from the perspective of your own ancient and eternal past. Does that help?" she asks as her form begins to dissolve, like particles of sugar in a glass of water. Left behind is the reflection of a woman just a bit younger, still with wrinkles and graying hair but a more acceptable and not so decrepit version of myself. I breathe a sigh of relief – not that old yet. And definitely not dead – yet.

**To purchase the full book "Still Not Dead Yet 2",  
please [visit the book's page on Amazon.com](#)**