

Another Circle 'Round the Sun

Happy Holidays! I hope this missive finds you enjoying life, family, and friends.

I remember starting one of these letters with feeling "solidly in middle age." That was a while ago. I still feel "middle-aged" but on the cusp of "senior citizen" (something the AARP and the IGA have considered me for 18 years). Transitioning towards senior citizen has been something I've thought about ever since I considered myself "solidly in middle age." Still, as I close in, it feels less daunting and almost comforting.

We live in a culture that values accomplishment and ambition—one of the main reasons we are on the brink of extinction—and letting go of the idea that I must *do* things to feel satisfied has been a challenge. I remind myself that I'm a human *being*, not a human *doing*, but moving that idea from my head to my heart has been a challenge. What I *haven't* done tends to overshadow the prints I *have* left on the world. It's true that I could have done so much more, but the fact is, I did what I did, and looking back should elicit joy, not guilt. I have a long way, an infinitely long way, to go to be fully at peace, but I'm on the path. And as Joseph Campbell says, "When you are on the path, you are at the goal."

Many, if not all, of my December missives have included dogs. It's been over 13 months since Angus passed on, and I am still without a primary dog in my life. I say "primary" because there are many dogs in my life, all of whom I love dearly. Three of my closest canine friends have followed Angus: his sister, Mieta, niece, Penny, and soul brother Lab, Chip. Tears form when I think of them, but they are tears of joy as well as loss.

I wasn't sure I was going to "get another dog"—it sounds like they are replaceable, like light bulbs—but I have been a pupil without a master for some time. There is an empty, dog-shaped space in my life, and I think it is time to fill it.

As I have noted before, my life is divided into 4 dogs from the age of 6 to 66. At 68, I imagine this will be the last dog chapter. I wonder what new lessons he will have in store for me. I know he'll get me out for more exercise and keep me laughing and having fun. There will be some deeper lessons, too. After all, there is no limit to the preconceptions I can let go of. That's what growth is, isn't it? It's not so much learning new things as letting old stuff go. At least I hope so, as my memory seems to be letting stuff go at an accelerating pace.

One thing that seems to increase exponentially as I age is my feeling of gratitude. I know I've said this before, but it is truly the dominant feeling in my life and why I'm as (annoyingly) joyful as I am. And I feel most grateful for you, the people in my life whose light illuminates my path, heals my wounds, and stirs optimism in these troubled times. Gratitude will be the hardest thing to let go of, and probably the last thing I part with, as I shed my mortal coil.

May gratitude fill your life to bursting this holiday.



Joe Heller

*True story, Word of Honor:
Joseph Heller, an important and funny writer
now dead,
and I were at a party given by a billionaire
on Shelter Island.
I said, "Joe, how does it make you feel
to know that our host only yesterday
may have made more money
than your novel 'Catch-22.'
has earned in its entire history?"
And Joe said, "I've got something he can never have."
And I said, "What on earth could that be, Joe?"
And Joe said, "The knowledge that I've got enough."
Not bad! Rest in peace!*

— Kurt Vonnegut; *The New Yorker*; May, 2005