

Outside the Lines

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It was just a routine check-up. He was an oral surgeon, and I expected him to examine my teeth, do an X-ray or three, and send me on my way with a \$1262 bill for the 10 minutes of his time, so it surprised me when he finished his exam, leaned back with arms crossed and eyes on my face, and asked my age. Never mind the fact that I'd just filled out my birthdate in triplicate on approximately 18 forms during my sojourn in the waiting room. I informed him that I was, indeed, 44.

And that's when he gave me his treatment plan:

"Almost everything I do now is Botox and fillers. So call me and we'll set that up for you."

Pat on hand. End of appointment. Bye bye.

I must have looked as confused as I felt, wandering out to my car. Of course, if I had had the Botox, you'd never be able to tell that I was confused. He had been so cavalier, as if he were reminding me that I needed a mammogram or my next teeth cleaning. I was the right age for All Of The Things, so of course we should get that filler party started.

There's nothing wrong with changing something about yourself. I know what it's like to feel so self-conscious about something that, once you alter it, you free up the head space you used to spend obsessing over it. That can be a very healing choice to make.

But I also know what it's like to leaf through a magazine where one page encourages investment in your inner self and the next advertises the newest cream, infused with the tears of yaks who wander the mountain plateaus of Tibet, a cream which will certainly change your life and, if not that, definitely your forehead.

I know what it's like to see a photo of yourself and wonder when your under-eye area was mysteriously replaced with something resembling discarded tissue paper. Or to look down at your hands and see those of your grandmother instead. I adore that sweet lady, but she should keep her hands to herself.

Yet here's what I'm starting to know even more: Those wrinkles and lines are on my face because they are my proof, my cancelled train ticket, my stamped passport

that I lived this life. I cried those tears from the heartaches that shifted and changed and remolded my heart and the skin around the eyes that cried them.

I belly-laughed those beautiful moments where my soul felt it could not contain the great big joy all around and in me, and the stretch marks across that belly are the train tracks of those travels.

Those parentheses framing my mouth are my souvenir from long, soul-precious talks with friends. These wiry new strands on my head show that I am closing the chapter of my life where I carried and nourished three humans, that chapter where I was given the unique joys and hurts of motherhood.

No one else walked my same steps and tasted the same kisses and breathed in the same sunrises and cried the same heartbreaks as my journey held. And no one else has your same scars and souvenirs, either.

What if we started cherishing those marks for what they are instead of desperately chasing an eraser, one that will never actually be found?

What if we stopped trying to cancel out the years we have lived? What if we, instead, were proud to look 44 if, indeed, we are 44?

What if we traced those lines upon our faces and bodies as if they were journeys on the map of our lives?

What if we stopped trying to look like women who hadn't lived any life and embraced the fact that we have stories to share?

Recently, I buzzed around the crowded aisles of a beauty store in Times Square, sampling products and oohing over the gorgeous scents and shades with my niece. We both left with items that we later spread out like glittery gems across our hotel room bed. And we'll do it again the next time we are there. And I'll still be intrigued by the snail-snot-infused serum (Yes. It's an actual thing.) And I'll still slather the oils and lotions on my face. But I won't be disappointed when the lines linger. Because they draw my story, and your lines draw yours, and that story has its own beauty that can't be bottled.

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