Twitter Thread by Dr. Kelly J. Baker (she/her)



Dr. Kelly J. Baker (she/her)
@kelly_j_baker



So, I was asked to write down my thoughts on the coup for a major newspaper earlier this week.

I told them no, and let me tell you why.

In 2016, after the election I wrote an op-ed on white nationalism and the alt-right for a major newspaper and appeared on MSNBC.

I was hyped to have the opportunity to share my expertise with a wider audience.

I wasn't prepared for what came next.

The op-ed was shared pretty widely. It is probably as close as I've come to a viral piece.

I wrote for a prestigious pub, and people were reading about my scholarly research.

Cool, right?

Not quite.

The day the op-ed was published I was at an amusement park with my partner, two kids, nephew and niece, one of my sisters and her partner.

While waiting on the kids to get off a ride, I started getting messages from folks asking if I was okay.

I was confused. Why wouldn't I be okay?

Well, then, folks were like, "Uh, there are some pretty nasty threats being lobbed at you on Twitter."

So, I kind of knew that writing an op-ed on white supremacy as a woman would lead to some trolling.

I knew what it was like to be a woman writer on the internet. Shit can get rough.

What I wasn't prepared for was the deluge of nasty insults and threats on Twitter.

So, I was sitting on a bench at a damn amusement park scrolling through tweets about how I should fucking die already or that someone wanted to kill me.

While my kids were having a great day, I was shaking and crying on a bench trying to report and block as many threats as I could.

But I couldn't do it fast enough but terrible shit kept pouring in. I would report one and multiple more would pop up.

I thought I was gonna throw up, and I tried to put on a brave face.

My partner knew what was wrong, but I didn't want to fuck up my kids' day, you know?

Now, my partner didn't have to wrestle my phone out of my hands, but it was close.

He took it away and promised to sheriff my mentions.

And he did. For multiple days.

One of the people I love most in the world and who loves me the most got to wade through death threats and report them. For days.

I was shook up. He was too.

I pretty much decided that I would never write for a major newspaper every again.

When I thought the threats had tapered off, I noticed a message on my Facebook author page.

Some dude with Trump as his avatar described in detail how he would murder me.

Then, a friend pointed out that a Klan newspaper that appeared on Rachel Maddow's show mentioned me by name.

I felt sick to my stomach for weeks. I couldn't wrap my head around strangers going out of their way to threaten me and create elaborate scenarios of how they would killed me.

And for awhile, I didn't write about white supremacy at all.

I pretty much thought I was fucking done.

Now, my commitment to not write about white supremacy and white supremacists didn't last long.

I obviously kept doing it.

So, this week, an email landed in my inbox from a major newspaper to write about a coup.

And I hesitated about writing anything, but I checked in with my partner to see what he thought.

I didn't pay attention to the fact that my 12-year-old was close enough to eavesdrop.

My partner and I were weighing the pros and cons. There were more cons.

But then I said, "I'm not sure that I can handle all the death threats."

My 12-year-old, who was already following the news about the coup (cellphones, man), shouted, "You have had death threats?! How have y'all not told me?"

And I was like, Oh shit.

So, my oldest kiddo was 8 when I received the first round of threats, and we didn't share what had happened to her.

She was totally shocked that anyone would threaten her mom.

(No shit, right?)

Now, she's 12. She gets that the internet is not a safe place.

We've had many conversations about being safe on the internet, and we pay attention to what she can get access to on her locked down phone.

My partner and I, then, find ourselves in the situation where we have to explain, Yes, Mom has been threatened for writing about white supremacists. No, it hasn't happened recently. Yes, Mom is okay despite what happened (uh, that might have been a bit of a lie).

My 12-year-old processes this for a minute or two and then says, "Mom, you can't write this op-ed. I don't want anybody to threaten you."

And then, she asked, "Has anyone threatened the rest of us?"

Luckily, I could tell my oldest kiddo that no one threatened the rest of the family. They only threatened me.

She was mostly soothed by this, but still struggled with the "people (dudes) on the internet wanted my mom dead."

So, I promised her that I wouldn't write an op-ed on the coup.

And she's been doing fine since she had that promise.

I emailed the editor explained that while I had a lot of thoughts about the coup that I couldn't write an op-ed because I didn't want to deal with death threats like I had before.

The editor got it.

All of this to say that I am not comfortable writing an op-ed on the coup because of the likely aftermath.

It's not worth my well-being or my family's.

So, if y'all noticed that I have mostly been tweeting about the coup and white supremacy, that's why.

Oh wow, thanks to all of y'all who have checked in. I greatly appreciate it. This is what makes Twitter a mostly good place for me to be.