

The Face in the Oatmeal

by Carl Santoro

Five months after his father's death, 43 year old Marvin Teawater finally sat down to look through the huge binder that his father took many years to assemble. It was titled, "Be Glad for the Corny Things."

The size and weight of the huge 3" angle D-ring monster was daunting. It could hold 570 sheets.

Marvin guessed, it had that and much more. The Table of Contents had a subtitle, "Dad's Book about Basic Things in Life to Keep in Mind...Basic Training for a Sane Mind." Colored tabs led to topics labeled, "God," followed by, "Time," followed by, "Art," "Life," "People," "Love," "Literature," "Music," "Family," "Death," "House," "Survival." It contained articles torn from newspapers, hand-written paragraphs about personal observations, metaphysical queries, quotes from philosophers, theologians, poets, painters and more.

Perhaps his father was a tortured genius having the arrogance to think that hard work and tenacity could harness the unanticipated moment, like a wild colt, into one's control.

It was soon obvious the objective of the book was to know more about oneself and the world and apply that knowledge to life's challenges; ideas to arm oneself so one wouldn't go out of their minds from the pain of unanswered questions like, "Who or what put us here? Further reading began to trigger unsettling memories. This was not the Dad he grew up with. This was not the irate, impatient laborer who took Marvin's young head from behind and pushed it into a bowl of hot oatmeal because Marvin didn't want to eat. He began to see a deeper, tender side here, instead. A man who had concerns about compassion. He tore out a beautiful poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko titled, "People," to savor later. "In any man who dies there dies with him his first snow and kiss and fight - it goes with him;" a favorite passage.

Marvin felt as though this book, like an oscillating fan in a smoke-filled room, was carving out clarity wherever the blades were aimed.

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What was revealed only led to more questions about other mysterious and invisible realities. He was not content with the routine appearance of things. He had the yearning, like Pascal, to "know oneself", but amped it up and yearned to know everything.

But why didn't he know me?" Marvin pondered.

That dreadful morning long ago had sabotaged his trust, his love for his father. The memory of sitting at the table, forced to wear a wet mask violating the vulnerability of youth and mocking the purity of innocent flesh. What was the purpose? What the victory? What "the knowledge" there? Was it for more than the purpose of consuming and craving between consuming? Was it basic training for a sane mind? Was it corny?

Marvin stared at the "Survival" tab for several minutes.

He closed his eyes and closed the book for another day.

