

Remaking Your Dreams Come True

by Todd Maupin

Reincarnation. Not a bad deal, especially for cows. For the rest of us, it is like being in a witness protection program. You are given the opportunity to start fresh in another existence, in a new place, with a new identity to lead a new life. Maybe even a meaningless task to occupy you. And all without the risk of having those against whom you bore witness coming after you. Usually.

Through how many different forms had I cycled thusfar? I had been an athlete, a procurement agent, an information specialist, a messenger, a support specialist and a courier. I had worked in textiles, logistics, entertainment, retail, education, food service, and agriculture. Not all of these terms were necessarily used in the time I was engaged in these activities but to simplify matters, I am using the terminology that is currently en vogue. The lingo will be revamped again soon, and perhaps already has by the time you read this. Dratted Generation X.

My current existence had been mostly okay, until now. Somehow, Pascal had discovered that my contemporary illustrious essence of being was not my first rodeo. Literally. I had been to a rodeo in a previous form, but never mind that. Pascal was not concerned about rodeo clowns, steer wrestling or bucking broncos. He had more torturous ventures in mind for me. In fact, he was torturing me, subjecting me to all sorts of pain and suffering, to coerce me until telling him what he thought I knew.

Often people will lament that they are being pulled in all directions. I assure you that being pulled in two directions will suffice for maximum discomfort. Other times, we might observe about someone that he or she looks stressed. "They are stretching themselves too thin!" Better them doing this to themselves as good

faith masochists than being at the mercy of Pascal. Actually, there had been no mercy so far, but one could hope.

How long ago had we started this session of torment? I was delirious and barely coherent, not the best mindset for someone from whom a type like Pascal wants to extract information. A drawback to the elements of torture, I suppose. After thousands of years, you would think they would have overcome that particular hiccup.

An intensification of his methods and a raise in Pascal's voice brought me back to the present. "Tell me the formula. It is no use holding out, Skip. I know you know it." Pascal had discovered my years in Atlanta.

I grunted something unintelligible. It may have been more of a gasp, a mutter or even a moan. Whatever it was, I could not have even told you what I said. This was not my most articulate moment. Pascal leaned in closer, which coincided with a loosening up on the levers, offering a sudden respite to the anguish.

"What did you say?" Pascal asked menacingly. To be fair, to someone being tortured, practically anything their interlocutor asks would sound menacing. Do you like embroidery? Menacing.

"I don't know the formula. I told you this. I was only the recipient. All I did was transport it," I maundered weakly. Cool word, right? I would have to remember it when I was not being tortured. In general, speech was not my forte, but I was willing to jump through some hoops for a change. Hopefully, an abrupt change that would lead to a much less painful state. South Carolina? No, not type of state, but, in any case, no, just no.

Pascal laughed maniacally, in a twirling mustache, strap the damsel to the railroad tracks kind of way. There were no rails or crossties in the vicinity, nor damsels, but I was envious of any fate but mine at that moment. "I happen to know that you transported it multiple times over the years. It's inconceivable that you did not internalize it."

I was in no position to play semantics with Pascal about the validity of his words, but I still did not know the formula. That was

the truth, and it pained me to say it. It truly did. "I swear to you that, if I knew it, I would tell you. All I ever knew was the ingredients."

Pascal backed away from me, reaching for the levers. "I know the ingredients too, as does anyone who can read. No one is going to label you a traitor if you tell me, Skip. From the looks of you now, those days are over." I had to admit begrudgingly and dejectedly that he was correct. In my current form, they would not have given me a second thought, not even in Atlanta. They would have cast me aside without skipping a beat. Ironically.

Pascal hovered near the levers. Perhaps he was toying with me - an unfortunate reversal of fortune - or he was just being dramatic or cruel. The Germans probably have a word that means both. Suddenly, he ended the tension, well, the theatrics of it, as pulling the levers created ever more tension for me. I was pulled ever more taut, as though it would have compelled me to speak freely. So to speak.

The pain was unconscionable. I could feel - just barely, as I was feeling overwhelming, resounding and agonizing pain in every essence of my being - that I was about to black out, and that would probably be the end of my quiddity. It's a real word; look it up. Then, with little to no fanfare, I would move on to the next existence.

Pascal showed no quarter, not even two bits worth of compassion. He maneuvered the levers to their limits, which were beyond mine. I snapped. No, I did not snap and spill my guts and tell him the formula. I had no guts and, truly, I did not know the formula. I just snapped. Kaput. It was the end of the line for me as a plastic jump rope for kids.

What was in store for me next? As I mentioned earlier, I had been an athlete, serving as the soccer ball used in the regional championships. American Express sent me out to be a procurement agent in the wallet of one of its best customers. My time as a plastic clipboard had made me an information specialist. While I was a dry erase board, I had been an effective messenger in a college dorm. Pizza Hut put me to work as a support specialist in the form of a booster seat for young diners.

Reincarnation. Recycling. The terms are interchangeable for those like me. Plastic can be molded into almost anything. My years as a courier in Atlanta were what interested Pascal and the other chemists at Pepsi. As one of the first plastic bottles created by Coca-Cola, I was used and reused thousands of times. Naturally, they did not share the formula with me. And certainly, there was nothing natural about that liquid I carried around.

I could not blame Pascal nor his handlers for his methods. Pepsi was not inherently evil, no matter what anyone says about Crystal Pepsi or Pepsi Blue.

Maybe you do not believe in reincarnation, or that a jump rope could talk, even under duress. It is a leap of faith.

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