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There's Nothing Fun about a FUNeral

Chris King

"Eef, you shouldn't be afraid of death. Death is really just a dramatic way of reconfiguring your priorities. And it's also humanitarian, isn't it? When I die, I'll be lightening the load on social security, won't I?" That's what my grandpa used to tell me. My grandpa told me lots of things. I gained a wealth of knowledge from my grandpa. My mom once told me all that wealth had some serious liens on it, but by that point my head had been so filled with facetious metaphors I locked down the advice barracks... or something.

My grandpa told me lots of things (He even had advice on how I could fight my nervous ticks; he bought me a tape player and told me to listen to classical music whenever I felt nervous. But unfortunately I didn't own any classical music, so now whenever I feel nervous, I often catch myself humming songs from my sister's Paula Abdul tapes), but what really stuck was his career advice, "Eef, the perfect job is out there. I tell you, your dream job does exist, my boy. And your grandpa'd never lie to you, would he?" I later found that whenever a similar piece of optimistic wisdom was bestowed upon me, it usually followed by reciting some sort of oath promising to work hard at all my endeavors; to never give up; to contribute to society, eat vegetables and whatnot. My grandpa, however, told me, "And the best thing you can possibly do, is just wait. You just sit there, Eef, just sit there and it'll happen." I suppose I could point out that my grandpa was later convicted for some sort of real estate fraud.

Sit and wait he said. And that's just what I did. And I tell you, it was just wonderful for me (especially since I'm fairly certain social interaction may cause angina), and if anyone seemed to have a problem with it, my grandpa had an answer for that as well, "Just tell 'em you were listening to me and respecting my wishes. Who's gonna pitch a fit over you listening to your grandpa? I do believe it's a concept universally endorsed, isn't it? Eef, my boy, all major religions really just boil down to: respect your elders, don't they? Eef, what I mean to say is, God's pretty old, right? And, I'm not Catholic, but the Pope is chosen basically by seniority, isn't he?"

Anyway, it's been a quarter century of sitting and I feel pretty rested. Grandpa reconfigured his priorities four years ago, but I do believe his theory has proven valid. Not the one about me having thousands of sexual encounters with beautiful women. Most of my intimate encounters with women consisted of trips to the hair salon and to the pharmacy to pick up my asthma, anxiety, and anti-depressant medication. My sister once told me that I'm just like grandpa, without the confidence, charm, wit, stability, work ethic, or good fortune. I take one of the red pills when I think about my sister. But I do believe my grandpa's theory on careerism has worked out. And it seems that

even without voting for him, I am the direct beneficiary of what may be the only George W. Bush-created job opportunity in America. I guess the Department of Homeland Security is good for something. So thank you George, and I hope I am able to project the necessary qualificationismablenessity during my interview.

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"Let me start out by telling you a little bit about who we are and what we're trying to accomplish." I liked Lester DeLaney immediately. Though built like an animated washing machine, he moved with astonishing grace. He stood to shake my hand like it was the ballet. But based on the Bears memorabilia dominating his long, narrow office, I guessed that the Nutcracker was probably the extent of Lester's ballet expertise. "We are the Warrenville Commission on Death Prevention," Lester took a moment to inhale deeply and hook his thumbs around his orange suspenders. I took the opportunity to flick the severed remains of a bitten nail from off my finger; my left eye twitched when I saw it land in Lester's paperclip tray. "Now, as you know, this world just keeps getting crazier and crazier, and frankly, we gotta agree with those lefties who say that Tom Ridge's paint sample of terrorism just isn't enough," He chuckled to himself in review of his progressing introduction. "Hattie, my assistant, she gave me that one."

It may be important to note that Lester has a large black mole just above the right side of his mouth. It hopped around like one of those smiling balls in a kids' sing-along song, bouncing atop each of Lester's words. It may also be important to point out that the two green pills are kicking in and I have been nodding and semi-laughing at appropriate times.

"So, as you obviously know, the Warrenville City Council has created this department to help ensure that... people die less."

"How's it going so far, sir?" See, I'm personable.

"Oh, well it's very exciting. We have a lot of reasons to feel... just super. We feel like we can make a real difference. I mean, in a world like this, Warrenville needs us." Lester shot his weight back to his desk and shuffled through some papers. When he found the sheet of his pleasing, he read it carefully several times before he looked back to me with his blueberry eyes and continued, "It just makes sense: create a government commission to explore and initiate programs that work toward a goal of eliminating untimely deaths in the Warrenville community." The mole pressed against his nostril when he smiled widely. He threw his hands to the air and chuckled, "I mean, we won't leave any child behind, and we don't want them to die, you know?"

"I think that's very catchy, sir." See, I'm supportive and dedicated.

"Well, the sentiment is. Our communications department is still working on a slogan. They first came up with "There's nothing fun about a FUNeral" and "Life is better spent alive" but we're still looking for other options. But we do, however, already have a mascot, Livee, The Death Prevention Groundhog!" He held up an admittedly adorable stuffed animal that probably died very little.

"So anyway, kid, you're here to interview for our Death Research and Development division, right?" I nodded and Lester put on Livee, The Death Prevention Groundhog Safety Gloves to pour us both a glass of water. "So, we're basically looking

for this department to think of every possible way a Warrenville citizen could die. We're not asking you to come up with a way to help the problem, that's for the Prevention Division. We would just need you to spend your days researching, and dreaming up ways people die."

Grandpa was dead on; the perfect job did exist "Well, Mr. DeLaney, I really think I could do this work. I mean, I already spend a hefty chunk of my days thinking about death. Sometimes it's the first thing I notice about a place, the ways I could die in it. I'm not always good at coming up with ways to stop it though. But I'd be... super at thinking about death."

"Well, that's great kid; like I said, we don't need you to come up with the solution, just the problems."

"Oh yes, I'll stop trying, sir"

The mole bounced in laughter, "Oh, I like you, Leaf."

"Eef."

"Eh?"

"Nothing."

"You start on Monday, kid."

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Well, an obvious one was the blue, rusty car in front of mine could've simply stopped too quickly while the public bus behind me didn't bother and I became sandwiched between the two.

Or the commercial airliner crawling across the sky could have made a sudden, disastrous change in course right into the backseat of my far-too-feminine coupe (that pushy salesman told me it was ok because it said Turbo next to the name).

The fat, power walking mess of a middle aged man marching in place at the light could've rested against the pole just as I passed through the intersection; forcing a mass of metal to plunge through my sunroof and break open my head. The last thing I would have seen before dying was a big, bright light changing red.

The small band of complaining crows sitting on the electrical wires lining the street could have dismounted too carelessly and cut the wire with their claws. The wire then could have swung down and powered up my car. I had my arm resting out my window, so I most certainly would have died.

A "helicopter" seed from a nearby tree could have spun into my window and fallen directly into my mouth while I sang out loud to "Forever Your Girl". I probably would have choked and died.

I knew I was just scratching the surface. I could have died numerous times before even reaching my car, let alone the twenty-three minute drive back to my house. Grandpa may have said that death was humanitarian, but I knew that when I started work on Monday, I'd start a humanitarian crisis in Warrenville.