

Destiny at the Bottom of a Cereal Bowl

Written by

I don't like adult cereal much. I love King Vitamin (which few people other than my brother and I really seem to know about) and like Frosted Flakes and Cocoa Krispies, but I'll eat oatmeal, Raisin Bran and Grapenuts because I know I should and there's a lot of what I should be doing going on in my life right now.



Have you heard about these “cereal bars” springing up in cities like Chicago where you start your mornings mixing and matching a bowl full of any sort of Kellogg's, Post and General Mills confections? Add your choice of whole, low-fat or skim milk and chow down like you were 11 years old again, getting ready to make a dash for the school bus before a day of spelling and North American geography. One thing missing at this new breakfast smorgasbord is the cereal box. You miss reading the fun facts on the back of the package, burying your face in it and cowering over the contents of the bowl, crunching away and slurping up the leftover milk, wiping that stray drop from your chin before it hits the table or your nice clean shirt.

If you are behaving like an adult at the cereal bar and doing what you should do, you are mixing Total, Bran Flakes and Special K, steering clear of the Fruit Loops mixed with Honey Combs. And although I have always been repulsed by the idea of marshmallows in my cereal, I'll add a Lucky Charm to my cereal selections any day of the week, to include the annoying cartoon leprechaun, if it increases my odds of things going right at the office.

These bizarre thoughts about cereal popped into my head as I trotted around the track of a kid's soccer field at Myers Traditional Elementary School in Charlotte, NC this past week. I need to lose weight hence my jogging around the track. According to my doctor, I need to exercise 45 minutes every day and my brother is on a mission to talk me into a triathlon before the summer ends. My aspirations to meet any or all of these goals present a daily conflict between time and the trade-offs I make in order to please my employer, my family and myself.

Why was I in Charlotte running in circles and thinking about cereal? I have just begun an MFA program at Queens University in creative nonfiction and the track was just next door to the college. An MFA is a master's degree in fine arts, not a mother f___ing as___le as Mary Karr characterized the degree in *The Liar's Club*, a definition my husband found to be hilarious and one I finally enjoyed once I started laughing at myself again. This is all in the hopes that my writing vastly improves and “Whatever” gets better for you, the reader. The program also signifies the pursuit of my passion, a quest most of us have buried somewhere deep inside but never find the time, stamina or opportunity to pursue. Instead, we run around the circles of our everyday lives, like hamsters ceaselessly scuttling inside exercise wheels going nowhere.

While I was in Charlotte, I had the opportunity to attend a concert sponsored by the Friends of Music at Queens and free to students of any age. It was performed by an accomplished 80-year-old pianist who will be celebrating her 60th wedding anniversary in June after returning from San Diego where she will run in her 9th marathon sponsored by the American Leukemia Society. I mean come on. Not only was Harriette Line Thompson elegant, poised and well spoken, her hands and arms – her whole damn body – rode up and down that keyboard like a skateboarder speeding sideways on the ramps in the park beside our Naval Hospital. I was almost to the point of tears watching her, enjoying her rendition of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and wondering if her DNA was just that much better than mine. What else could it be? Maybe it was nothing more than her choice of childhood cereal. Growing up, I'll bet she probably choose Quaker Oats while I was content being cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, priding myself on a skillful performance of Three Blind Mice on the piano in our living room over forty

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years ago.

It had to be more than that. Hariette, tutored by her mother at the young age of four, had the love and support of her family early in life just like me. Today, she defies the confines of her age, conquering twenty-six miles of California pavement. Earlier in the week I saw her perform, she buried her brother and dedicated her performance of Chopin and Debussy to his memory. She shared her musical talent with the community, soothing grief in a moving tribute to a longtime sibling friendship.

People come into our lives at just the right time for reasons we don't always understand. I ate a bowl of Raisin Bran the day after I saw Mrs. Thompson perform and jogged around that track following a day in the classroom. Next week, I go back to work because passion needs to be fueled by practicality as well as the petrol of dreams. I eat Grape-Nuts at home and mix them into my Carb-Smart yogurt but every once in awhile I'll sneak in a couple of Sugar Pops mornings. I understand and accept the responsibilities of my adult condition but I am thrilled by possibilities of sweet dreams spelled out in my Alpha-Bits cereal.