

Taking it Easy

by Ed Higgins

At the Winslow Funeral Home in Winslow, Arizona, just like in the Eagles' 70s song "Take It Easy," only I'm not taking it easy. Because I'm seeing my first dead man, in the flesh so to speak, though I'm 39 years old and he doesn't look at all like Dad. Although Mom's crying serious tears as if he were. But maybe he isn't here I'm thinking, just off on another of those six month benders he regularly pulled when I was growing up. Or maybe at the VA crazies hospital back in San Jose, California, drying out again.

Anyway, picture this: A dead man's lying here in a way fake-wood-looking coffin. Lid up at mom's request. Some dead guy or other who cannot be my dearly, somewhat dearly, departed father just two weeks from being 56. This also fake-looking dead guy's all roughed up in something the mortician has pink-chalked and stitched back together from parts after the county coroner explored the inner workings of why this (to-me-unknown) man's not so old heart exploded to a stop of a sudden July morning. He had stood there at the intersection of deciding if he should unload the lumber off his old Chevy ton-and-a-half flatbed used to haul stuff to his outback construction site (where he was escaping alcoholism hammering up some sorta dream life in the desert). Or should he go back inside their nearby fifth-wheeler first and have another cup of coffee? Which according to mom was where she was waiting reading the morning paper he'd brought back from town. She vaguely wondering why he wasn't coming in for what seemed to her like forever, or at least half-an-hour ago. And now is forever.

So later we'll give whoever-this-dead-guy-is over to The Winslow Funeral Home's furnace. Flames hotter than the desert's own summer-Hell heat. The furnace will consume maybe-dad into grey ashes. All but for a few larger bones I'm told. But they're brittle enough from the intense heat so the furnace attendant carefully breaks the leftovers into smashed pieces with a carpenter's hammer kept on a nearby shelf for just this purpose. Then the ashes will be

poured into a faux-Greek urn my mother will keep in a back closet behind her's and dad's unused shoes, for years. This holding-on despite my pleas the ashes be scattered somewhere around the unfinished desert dream.

A few years later when Mom herself is ashes in a similar faux-Greek urn my younger brother in Fremont will rent a single engine Cessna to fly them both over San Francisco Bay. Out the Cessna's tiny window they go, silting down together into the bay's blue lapping waters. Past cat sharks and bay shiners we brothers used to fish for off the old Dumbarton bridge when kids. And I'm sometimes wondering what the cat sharks and bay shiners were thinking about this gray ash-cloud (of mom and, yes, dad) unexpectedly silting through their waters like crestfallen bay fog.

That morning back at the Winslow Funeral Home I'm still saying cliched non-comforting shit to all those whoever-they-are mourners I don't know from silting desert dust blowing through the open chapel doors. Finally, I can't think of any more claptrap comfort to say about this rouged, chalked-up corpse who really, really couldn't be my father anyway. Or anymore. So I stand there for what seemed like forever. Learning forever isn't. With only the Eagles' disquieting caution running through my mind.

