

THE STRAIGHT SHOT

In Praise Of The Miraculous by Jess Hardin



I remember well, back in the late 1970's, the excitement generated by what many considered to be a modern day miracle. A short order cook in the tiny mountain village of Taos Junction had flipped over a tortilla that he was frying, only to come face to face with a sepia-toned portrait of a sorrowful but all-forgiving Jesus Christ. And a Jesus with an earthy sense of humor. After rescuing it from the heat and saying the appropriate prayers, the perspiring chef showed it first to his envious coworkers and then to their astonished customers. Meals and conversations came to a halt, while all clustered around the breakfast apparition. Of those there at the time, the already devout had the fires of their beliefs well fueled, their convictions confirmed, their faith rewarded and confirmed. One woman later claimed to have been cured of some unrecorded illness, and nobody contradicted her. The sole atheist, it is said, began to reconsider his position, and to have actually admitted in public that not everything in the world could be adequately explained by the rational mind, nor qualified and quantified by scientific method.

I was only one of the several thousand people who came to witness the miracle over the course of the following few weeks, on display there for all to see. There were up to 50 vintage pickups, family station wagons and lowriders parked there at any given time, as well as a smattering of chopped Harley-Davidson motorcycles driven up from Española. A Mariachi band would drop by to provide entertainment for the onlookers, and in the evening the proprietor played cassette

tapes on his boom-box, alternating between religious selections in Spanish and rock bands from the 50's like The Platters, The Penguins, The Persuasions. The least persuaded about its holy origins were the bikers, ordering two plates of huevos rancheros each... and the most convinced were the local farmers and ranchers, who felt there must have been a special reason why the apparition had appeared in New Mexico instead of El Paso, say, or in the rural West instead of somewhere in the more settled and sometimes more disbelieving East. To settle the matter of the tortilla's divine origins, the interested parties brought in the Arch Diocese of Santa Fe, but in the end he decided it was better not make a proclamation one way or the other.

He was a wise man.

Who can say, after all, what is a miracle and what is not? The greatest mistake isn't finding divine inspiration in the everyday, or holiness in the commonplace. The greatest mistake is to take things for granted, failing to see in the familiar people, places and objects around us the suggestion of something larger, numinous and blessed. We are surely all products of, and participants in, miracles, whether we are paying attention to them or not.

First, there is the miracle of life, no matter what you believe its cause. What a tragedy, to forget even for a moment the wonder of each necessary breath, of our flesh and blood enabled somehow to move, to see, to know and better itself... to fall in love, to learn and to explore, to define and defend family and home, to serve some-

thing greater than ourselves alone, to paint pictures and write songs.

Some are big, like a precious little boy surviving a difficult brain operation. Some seem smaller, but are still amazing, such as the way a cut heals itself until it disappears. Or the way a pokey caterpillar turns into a butterfly, and then flies away. It seems like a miracle to me, that we are allowed to outlast and potentially learn from our misjudgments and distortions. That there are still exist rural communities like mine, in spite of the pressures of expanding world population and increased global regulation. That there are still national forests, neither privatized nor subdivided, which all citizens have a right to and a responsibility for. That there still exist places that appear fashioned by a specially empowered hand, land still unpaved and undeveloped, a home for myriad animals and plants and a place where all citizens can go to be quieted, nourished, strengthened and inspired.

As for myself, I see reflections of the miraculous in the eyes of loving children and in the way the mirror-like river turns the world upside down. In the ascendent arc of little birds when they make their first scary flight. In every gesture of caring or mercy, in these often uncaring and unforgiving times. In wildflowers that somehow make it through waves of both flood and drought, and in the smiles of neighbors that still wave! In the way that nature's herbs can help heal you, and the way the most amazing plant begins its existence in the form of a most tiny seed. In everything, most likely, can be found some evidence of the miraculous and the marvelous when we suspend our preconceptions and open to their greater meaning.

Over time, the image of Jesus faded as its edible canvas its inevitable decomposition. Some say the short order cook and the faithful who flocked that followed were all mistaken in their interpretation. I think that the bigger mistake (and this is no jest), is to look into even the most mundane and shapeless tortilla – into what can be the revealing patterns of our wondrous world and everyday lives – and behold anything less.

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Families of Combat Veterans: Is your Vet showing signs of PTSD? Symptoms include:
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While PTSD is serious, it is treatable. It is not a sign of personal weakness. Contact the Eugene Vet Center's Coos County contracted

counselor Susan Aviotti, LPC. Phone: 756-7748. Susan Aviotti, LPC has been serving this community for over 20 years working with combat veterans with PTSD and has over 26,000 hours of experience.

If you have not been awarded 50% disability by the VA, assessment and counseling may be available free through this program for at least a year.

For spouses and partners of combat vets, "Understanding the PTSD Combat Veteran" is a new 8 month program FOR wives and partners of PTSD combat veterans. This program will focus on providing wives:
*Tools to deal with PTSD
*Understanding the triggers
*How to help the children

A group meeting will be held at Noon on the last Thursday of each month, October through May.

FALL BOOK SALE IN COQUILLE

The Friends of the Coquille Library will be having their Fall Book Sale on Saturday, Nov. 7 and Sunday, Nov. 8. in the large auditorium at the Coquille Community Building, 105 N. Birch St.

Friends of the Library are invited to a preview sale on Saturday from 9am-10am. Memberships are available in the library or at the door on the day of the sale.

Doors open to the public at 10am and will be open to 3pm. Sunday's sale runs from Noon until 3pm. This is the very popular Buck a Bag Sale.

A special event has been added Saturday. The First Lutheran Church will be serving their famous

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There are books, movies, and more for everyone's reading interest. For your holiday shopping we are offering a selection of "gently used" books for bargain prices. For book collectors we have an extraordinary selection of vintage books, some dating back 150 years. Also for sale are beautiful sets of books. Those looking for the literary classics will not be disappointed. We have a large selection of cookbooks and crafts. You won't want to miss this sale.

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