

ADVENTURES OF A GRAVESTOMPER BY CORIN WHITE: BOOK EXCERPT

*Gravestomping? What the Fu**?*

My mother was fantastic at packing away her stuff for safekeeping. It was an art for her. She had shelves and shelves full of boxes which contained other boxes and in these were plastic bags turned with twist-ties which contained more boxes and bags and twist-ties. I don't know what was really in any of these boxes but she had a basement, four closets and an attic full of them. For all I know they contained her stash of twist-ties and plastic bags. I never asked her what was in them because it never interested me. Whatever was in those boxes was dead and stagnant and inaccessible. Why waste time trying to figure it out?

My mother didn't own anything precious or valuable. Just old knick-knacks and bed spreads, costume jewelry and outdated clothes that she'd never worn because she'd saved them for special occasions that never came. Still, she boxed them all and held



My grandmother's grave at Mount Carmel Cemetery in Hillside, IL. Down there is an unopened bottle of Chanel No. 5 that she was saving it for a special occasion.

on to them for safe-keeping. Someday they'd be significant, she thought. But they never were.

It was a family trait. My brother mastered my mother's talent for boxing up his stuff by the time he was eight and hoarded all of his treasures in boxes that he hid under his bed. When I was 29 we boxed my dead grandmother in a casket with a large bottle of Chanel No. 5, her favorite cologne. I'd bought her the cologne as a birthday gift a year before. Instead of enjoying it she packed it away for a special occasion. Guess her burial was as special as it got.

Humans love to box up their stuff and keep it. Jewelry and mementos, old photographs and diaries. 'Thin' clothes, one size too small, that they vow to someday get back into. Sporting equipment and musical instruments they swear they'll someday learn how to use.

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Closets, attics and storage lockers are filled with stuff that people have boxed up for “safe-keeping.” We even box up the rotting corpses of our dearly beloved and shove them into storage facilities called cemeteries.

Maybe it gives people some sense of control. Some illusion of permanence in an impermanent world. But they’re not really fooling anyone. Special occasions never come and cologne goes unused. ‘Thin’ clothes become two, three, four sizes too small and slide a generation out of fashion. Musical instruments rust and warp. Sporting equipment molds. Bodies become monstrosities. When people exhume the treasures they put away for safe keeping they smell musty and decayed, and never seem to look the same way they did when they were originally packed up.

Graveyards and death may seem like very strange things to write a book about. Photographing and filming cemeteries may seem like odd things for a guy to spend his time doing. But if you really pay attention to this book and what’s running under the surface, you’ll know that it’s not really about death. It’s about living.

Graveyards teach us very important lessons about the transient and immediate nature of life. They teach us to live in the moment and to take risks. They teach us that there is more to life than what we do from the hours of nine to five every day. They teach us there’s something much bigger than the titles, relationships and tiny little egos by which we define ourselves.

Take a walk through any graveyard and you'll see the culmination of lives spent exactly as yours are now: consumed by love; family; alliances and enemies; wars; financial success and ruin; broken hearts; illness; self-expression and self-torment. If there’s one thing that spending time in a graveyard teaches you, it’s that people don’t change unless they make a conscious effort to. They are now as they always were. You can see it just by reading the epitaphs on their tombstones. There’s no joy you’re experiencing now that thousands before you haven’t experienced. And there’s nothing you’re so tortured about at this moment that thousands of others haven’t struggled with too. Joy or pain, misery or magnificence — life always ends in the same place. You know the beginning and the outcome of your story already: so why not make the narrative in-between extraordinary?