



THE MEANING OF IT ALL

A Modern Day Parable inspired by Matthew 13:24-43

It's 30 years of memories, I can't just toss it all out with the trash! Carole's well-meaning friends were trying to help her sort through her life story which was painted into the portraits, written into the letters, and stamped into the walls and floors and ceilings of 313 Maple Street. She felt like she was standing in a giant passport though she had never ventured far from these four walls.

The COVID-19 pandemic had taken its toll on their small town, infecting more than half of its inhabitants. Carole's mother was their first COVID casualty. Though she wasn't a particularly sickly woman before, Carole's mother wore the virus like a python wrapped around her neck, slowly squeezing the life out of her. In a way, she was almost happy to have been infected and put out of her misery at last. The joy of living had been a struggle since her beloved Johnny and their son Ben died in the mining accident 10 years ago.

Carole was in her final year of college when her father, brother, and 16 other men perished doing the work of the town -- mining coal to heat homes across the US. It was noble work that came with grave dangers, a truth the town was forced to embrace that tragic day. Carole couldn't bear to leave her mother after experiencing such a loss. She had become the most fragile person Carole knew. So she lovingly delayed her plans to branch out and spread her wings. The two women had settled into a quiet and joyful routine, content to stay close at home.

All these years, Carole ran the local library and became the local historian. With full support of the community, she built an impressive mining museum. It had interactive displays for the children, and a beautiful memorial to the "Great Collapse of 2010" as they called it. Some of the miners' personal items were donated by their families, and Carole had a gift for making the simplest piece come to life with the owner's personality. Those men were not mere statistics. People came from miles around to see it. The museum even caught the attention of some national media and prominent visitors. Carole had turned this personal nightmare of hurt and fear and pain into a place of honor and beauty and pride.

One huge advantage to being a librarian is access to all the books. Carole read nearly every book in the library about world travel. She read volumes of fiction set in her favorite spots around the globe, and imagined herself in the stories -- walking in their footsteps, trying on their lifestyles. She patiently waited to become the main character of such adventures. Now, it was her turn. This small girl from this small town was ready to climb the tallest tree and see the world anew.

Carole's two best friends, Beth and Jamie, were there to help her clear out the house and launch into her dreams. Carole had patiently tilled the soil and tended the land of her upbringing, she had accepted all that came with that phase of her life -- the good and the bad. Now is harvest time! The three women were busy sifting through and packing up all the things Carole's mom had left behind. It was a lot of stuff. Beth and Jamie eagerly gathered into boxes all the seemingly useless items to donate them to a local shelter. Carole was a little concerned that her friends may be too hasty in discerning the value of some things.

She reached into a box of cookbooks. Most looked brand new and unused. She ran her hand up and down the spines and selected a bright blue one titled, "Desserts from Around the World." Jamie looked at her dear friend a little impatiently. "Come on Carole," she pleaded. "You can't take everything with you. That is one book you don't need since you will be actually tasting desserts around the world!" Carole nodded. She hugged the book to her chest and closed her eyes. A tear ran down her cheek as she recalled, "My father gave this book to my mother for their first anniversary, with a promise they would see the world together some day. That never happened," she sighed and more tears trickled to the book cover. On a whim, she opened the book to a random page and there in the margins of the book she saw a handwritten note by her mother.

It read, "Fantasy trip to Greece" with the date and a fictional travel log. "Johnny and I breathed in the crisp air and soaked in the bluest water we have ever seen. We sat and savored every bite and sipped on a perfect wine. Johnny looked deep into my eyes. We talked for hours, and it felt like our first date. He is still that blue-eyed boy I love. Greece is a favorite!" Her mother even drew a little heart. Now they were all in tears! Beth squealed, "That is the sweetest thing ever! Let's see if there is more!" Sure enough, the pages were filled with her mother's sweet stories of her parents' fantasy travels around the world! Carole was dumbfounded. She had no idea, but was most thankful she hadn't thrown this book out with all the others. This one is a treasure!

