

T H E S U N

A M A G A Z I N E O F I D E A S

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Dan Wakefield On The Path To Creativity
Poe Ballantine: How I Lost My Mind
The Happiest Man On The Beach

"Please, Enzo," I eventually implore, "my Italian is not so good."

He takes a step back in wide-eyed amazement. "But your father says-a you must-a practice." I shrug my shoulders, and he finishes off the haircut in dead silence.

When he is done, Enzo loosens my collar, brushes my neck with talcum, and holds up the mirror for my inspection. I retrieve my glasses and, without fail, am startled by the unfamiliar reflection: too short again.

"Perfect," I say, and smile weakly as Enzo, ever watchful, nods in agreement. Then I plod home, knowing that my wife will once again reel in horror when she sees me.

Why do I continue going to Enzo? Is it out of respect for my father? Am I too lazy to look for someone else? Perhaps I'm afraid of hurting Enzo's feelings. What I know is this: when recently, after seven years, I decided to try a new barber, who stocked different magazines and gave better haircuts, I felt as if I had cheated on my wife.

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WE EAT IN SILENCE AT THE MEDITATION retreat, seeing in each grain of rice the sun, the rain, the soil, and the human effort that brought this food to our bowls. Before lifting the fork to my mouth, I breathe deeply, and when my bowl is half empty I am already full. I appreciate the regular meals, the unavailability of snacks. (When I crave sugar or bread, I can usually ride it out—or else beg an energy bar from the woman who brought a month's supply.) I relearn what it is to enjoy food without trying unsuccessfully to use it as an escape from suffering. I hope to bring this lesson home with me.

And I do, for a few days. But before the week is out, anxiety drives me to the refrigerator, and I stand in front of it with the door open. Realizing what is happening, I take a deep breath and walk back upstairs. Fifteen minutes later, I am back in the kitchen. *Screw mindfulness*, I think, and eat some of my roommate's chocolate.

Is it hopeless? Does three weeks of practice stand a chance against years of habit? Or is it that my will is too weak?

Thankfully, I learned something else at the retreat: if mindful eating is impermanent, so, too, are anger and despair. Knowing this, I can call these feelings by name and wait for them to pass, confident that mindful eating will be possible again.

Kristin Barendsen
Oakland, California

WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD, MY brother and I got spankings almost every other day. The situations varied, but this is how it happened most:

I am lying on my bed upstairs reading a book when I hear my father's footsteps as he enters the house. "Keeeeeaaaaads!" he calls out, his tenor voice even higher than usual. (When you get spanked often, you become sensitive to the slight changes in tone of voice that indicate an impending spanking.)

My heart pounds as I answer, "Yes?"

"Come here!"

I walk shakily down the stairs.

"I was out there in the shop thinking about you," Daddy says to my brother and me. "I was thinking about all your sassy talk and your arrogance, and how *so many times* I have asked you to come out and say, 'Daddy, can I do anything to help?' and how you have *never*, not *once*, said those words." He is practically shaking with anger, his eyes filled with hatred, his voice approaching falsetto. "I think I owe you a *gooood* spanking!"

My brother and I start to cry. (I don't remember if the spankings were all that painful in themselves—they never left bruises—but combined with his screaming, they were quite traumatic.) Then he pulls up my dress, pulls down my underwear, and hits me with whatever implement he is currently using: his bare hand, his leather slipper, a switch that whistles as it comes whipping through the air, or the paddle he carved and hung on the living-room wall. He yells in rhythm

with the whacks, in a tight, high, angry voice, "Oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy! . . ." My brother and I scream and cry and call out to our mother for help, but Daddy won't tolerate being challenged by her. (She tried to get him to join her in reading child-rearing books, but he told her he had to follow his "instincts.")

Now, more than twenty-five years later, my father and I have actually become quite friendly. A year or so ago, though, he had a rare recurrence of his angry episodes, and, flashing back to the painful past, I screamed at him for all the beatings he'd given me.

"I thought I was a good father," he said, raising his eyebrows over wounded, but still reproachful, eyes.

Name Withheld

MY HABITS ARE A MIRROR IMAGE OF my father's. He wore a necktie from the moment he emerged from the bedroom in the morning, to the time he retired there at night, even on weekends; I wear a tie only to weddings and funerals. He liked classical music exclusively; I listen to R & B. He liked his eggs sunny side up; I eat them over hard. My father was temperamentally pessimistic; I tend to see the silver lining even when it isn't there. (When my father saw the German Army marching into our village in Yugoslavia, he predicted they would conquer the world. Only seven years old at the time, I kicked him in the shin and shouted, "Never!")

So much of who I am today is defined by my contempt and hatred for my father. Now that he's dead, and I'm at the brink of old age myself, I understand him a lot better, and have forgiven him for his frequent rages and his perpetual aura of misery. I am even thankful to him for saving my life from the Nazis. But to a large extent I still identify myself as Not My Father.

Sasha Rosenberger
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"PSST. PSST! YOU AWAKE?" EVERY morning at 4 A.M., it was the same: Grandpa would come to my door, looking for company. I'd scramble out of