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THE SWAG METHOD

By

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Chapter One: A Brief History

One time when she was in Texas, a flat and hot land dotted with bottle trees and garden gnomes, cow skulls and white gravel lawns; she stopped at the local gas, food, beer and live bait store to make some purchases. While she was there she noticed a sign over a giant tank next to the frozen food and bait section made out of an old Coca-Cola freezer that contained thousands of guppies. It read, "We catch our bait by the SWAG Method." The SWAG Method is an acronym for the Scientific Wild Ass Guess. The notion of a life determined by the SWAG Method appealed greatly. Years later she related the story to her father, a very smart engineer. He told her that in his business they frequently rely on the SWAG Method to calculate rates, amounts, flows and levels. She was confused. How could bait counting and engineering, a purely scientific field, base their performance on the same methods?

The SWAG Method is a logical way of life. We try to be accurate. We try to be forthright, honest, and good. We try to obey the girl scout laws. To do the best job possible within the realm of human error. But beyond a certain point we must rely on a SWAG. Even science has proven as much. That which was predictable and everlasting proved random. Chaos in a pendulum, randomness in a fixed state. Science relies on proven theories and fixed constants. After a certain point the

SWAG method comes into play. The perfection hypothesis is proven unobtainable. But even in Chaos theory this newly proven randomness has a geometric structure of its own. A SWAG within a SWAG.

She used to rely totally on science to explain all things. She studied chemistry and biology and physics. She thought she would be able to understand everything. Everything had a basis in fact. Everything could be proved or disproved. Everything could be understood. But live bait threw her off her course. As she got older, she finally realized that science was not the omnipotent cure-all she believed it to be. She stopped floundering and groping through "Scientific American" every month. She gave up her membership to the Cousteau Society. She ripped the "World Wildlife Federation" and "Save The Whales" bumper sticker off her 1978 Ford Pick-up truck. In the end, science let her down.

She came from the suburbs. She could only rely on her culture, her heritage to guide her. And her heritage was the white girl middle class simulated surface heritage. A junk mail mentality consumed her culture. Bombarded with unending information and ceaseless visual stimulation; convenience and excess clouded her judgment. It could take an entire afternoon to read and perceive the instructions sent by Ed MacMahon or Publisher's Clearing House. She embraced the slipshod, the ready made, the most accessible; a pre-packaged value system.

The SWAG Method accurately describes a convenient prescription for

everyday existence. The mundane easily replaces the sublime. Social obligations and moral concerns are a farce. The roach crawling across the kitchen floor, the newest edition of the Enquirer, Elvis' transcendence are more important, more intimate than worldly endeavors. The lofty ideal of ART as Savior perishes. Gravity keeps us firmly anchored to the ground. The SWAG Method examines our humanness, the acceptance and tolerance, the celebration and shame of what this culture has created.

Chapter Two: SWAG Art, Method And The Making

She grew up accumulating consumables and useless necessities. Her family moved every other year or so. Like all Patriotic suburban middle class families they had a new house built for them every move. Endless carpet, Formica, linoleum and wallpaper samples littered her childhood. Taste and home fashions seemed to change without reason or provocation. Early American, Colonial French, Modern Danish; her only real glimpse of a multi-cultural society was through furniture fashions. The choices were unending, the possibilities vast.

Throughout these tumultuous times she was slowly educated. Public school, television and Catholic-ish parents imparted their conventional wisdom. She was taught all the relevant lessons and morals needed to take care of yourself in this jungle called the suburbs. Humility, Faith, Tolerance, Fashion. Finally she left her homely haven with all values intact and assured.

Naive and unwary she ventured out to try her new and improved morality on the rest of the world. But things didn't seem to fit just right. Some people had less, some had no excess. Television society was not the same as reality. Everyone else didn't know what her parents assumed everyone knew. Things were strange. Unequipped to deal with a harsher world, and stricken by her live bait hypothesis; she escaped to the idealistic realm of art making. Here there were no threats, expression was the only vice. You could say or believe anything you wanted, if it was politically correct and generous to all. And she knew the lesson of generosity well. All it required was excess, and she had plenty of that to give away. Excess idealism, excess morality, excess unused information; she would impart her generous amounts of wisdom to all.

The failure of science to supply all the answers eventually created more questions. Mixed with liberal doses of the aforementioned qualities, thankless postulations intruded her ever thoughtful thoughts. "If bread was the body of Christ, was the Pillsbury Dough Boy the next Messiah?" "How did Heimlich invent his maneuver and who did he practice on?" "Is man's ability to barbecue a search for the eternal flame?" "Did Kennedy barbecue?" "If there is no Greenhouse Effect why does it get hotter every summer?" Her mind, needless to say, was never at rest.

SWAG Art is easy. First take all the things you are most familiar with, stuff with a historical, social or purely self-serving relevance are best; Formica, vinyl, imitation brick, plastic flowers, kitchen burners, BBQ

starters...(things that plug in are very good to use). Mix these objects together with media saturated images and/or science related items. Make sure they offer some shallow or in depth examination of the white girl society. Affix them with wood, silicon, putty, glue, nails or staples. Hang it all on a wall, preferably close to an electrical outlet.

Chapter Three: SWAG Case Studies

Two pieces of SWAG art conforming to the above principles will be further examined beginning with "Suburban Series: Devotion", and followed by "The Shroud Of Elvis".

The "Suburban Series" is a set of wall sculptures all teaching a certain lesson learned through the suburban middle class whitey value system. In "Devotion" the idea of faith is examined. A three piece cross-shaped sculpture is made from wood, vinyl, black velvet paintings, Formica, light bulbs, swag lamp chains, and images of the Last Supper, Buddha and a crystal silk-screened over the assemblage. The materials were selected to reference the interior decor of the typical home of the culture. The images relate to the restlessness and searching for a better belief system; be it Buddhism, Christianity or New Age Faith. The circular light bulb on the upper portion of the assemblage represents a halo or guiding light. The swag (not incidentally) lamp chain binds or enslaves the three separate pieces into one structure; to become one or to become enslaved by that faith.

The "Shroud Of Elvis" is a large 12 foot by 12 foot black velvet shroud

with a faint image of, perhaps, the King. Enclosed in a small black room and completely lit from above by black lights, the dim white image on the fabric appears to be glowing in a seemingly other-worldly fashion. The shroud is diagrammed by small plaques pointing out important features; bacon grease stain, big collar.... Placed in front of the shroud is a large black hole constructed out of rebar, painted white and aglow from the black lights. The shroud references the Shroud of Turin, an article of worship recently proven ungenueine. It has been dated back to the fourteenth century, possibly fabricated during the time of the Black Plague, when people needed some object or sign to reassure their faith. The faint image of a tortured figure is in fact real and true, a crucified man to be sure, but who? The Shroud of Elvis is perhaps as genuine as the original shroud, a sign that the King is not dead, maybe even reborn. And possibly somewhere in space.

Chapter Four: A Final Thought

In the eternal quest to prove the SWAG Method a safe and savory lifestyle, the search must continue. New genres can help in the search. Video is a logical research tool, being an elemental purveyor of the SWAG precepts. Questions will always be in need of answers, theories will always need practicum and the SWAG will be there to provide insight and outlook for all who believe.

