

2024 ADULT ESSAY CONTEST – 3RD PLACE

Of Costco & Whiskers

By Jonathan Kronstadt

The only thing I hate worse than having whiskers on my face is the act of shaving them off. This is, as you might imagine, a duality I had to come to grips with years ago, and the compromise my twin loathings produced is that I only shave about once a week.

Subsequently, I don't buy a ton of shaving cream. But I was at Costco a while back, and you know how one gets at Costco, so when I saw six-packs of cartoonishly tall cans of Gillette Edge sensitive skin (my brand!) I chucked one into my cartoonishly large shopping cart and went on my Costco-y way. I'd use it all up eventually, and this way I could cross shaving cream off my shopping list for the foreseeable future. But later, while unloading, I had an unnerving thought: What if I don't outlive it?

I did some quick Googling followed by some even quicker multiplication, none of which eased my mind in the slightest. Gillette says you should get 50 shaves from a 7-ounce can, but mine were 14-ouncers, so at one shave a week it'd take me two years to get through one can and a full dozen to polish off the six-pack. I just turned 66, and while my plan is to still be here at 78, I'm not sure what the Vegas line would be on my prospects, and I don't love the idea of having to itemize health and beauty products in my last will and testament.

Now I'm no happier than you are about the logical extension of this line of thinking, but it's inescapable; there must be an actuary at every Costco checkout stand to flag potential purchases that have, let's say, a 50% or better chance of outliving their purchasers. Kind of like the "you must be this tall to ride this ride" prohibition, just at the opposite end of the life cycle, as in "you must be this young to buy this 128-ounce can of shaved white truffles."

I'm getting to an age where one starts looking at things with an increased focus on finality, resolution, and other gut-wobbling perspectives. We do a much better job of helping people lead healthy enough lives to reach old age than helping them figure out what to do once they get there. And so, like much of life, elder learning is a lot of trial and error, though the error stakes get exponentially higher with each passing year. I used to yell at my kids when they came down stairs while looking at their phones; now that I've entered the demographic for which falling is a leading cause of not being able to get up ever again, I pause before each stair descent, making sure to have whatever faculties already haven't fled the scene locked and loaded for the increasingly perilous journey. In fact, at this point, the only thing I fear more than a trip downstairs...is shaving.