

A

Aa

Some kind of lava.

Almost always the first entry in any encyclopedia.

And, more important, the very first entry in the Encyclopedia of Me, Tink Aaron-Martin. Exclamation point! Ta-daaaaa! Dance for joy! Etc.!

The fact that “aa” is a word at all is the most terrific thing I learned from reading the entire set of encyclopedias.¹ I’m sorry, but it’s true. Things that are not true include the sentence, “I read the entire set of encyclopedias.” But I did look at most some of them. They are quite attractive. The edges of all the pages are dipped in gold dust that shimmers like a pop star’s eye makeup.

In my defense, it’s too hot to read.

Likewise, it is also too hot to write. But that won’t stop me! I am an unstoppable force of encyclopedia-writing brilliance! I am . . .

Grounded. Which means that I have a lot more spare time than the average almost-thirteen-year-old.

I expect this book will take a long time to write — a week, if Hortense, our hairless catlike animal, stops bothering me; ten

1. This was inspired by my dad, who took it upon himself to read the entire set of encyclopedias last year, which he began by buying a set of ancient books at a garage sale for \$7. He did not get past A, although he lies and says he got to C. I know he is lying because if you ask him, for example, about Burundi, he just stares at you blankly and then says, “Is that a spider in your hair?” which is Classic Avoidance. I tried valiantly to outdo him — after all, imagine the accolades I would get for READING THE ENCYCLOPEDIAS! But after the first hundred or so entries I slipped into a deep and nearly irreversible coma triggered by severe boredom. I am just lucky I survived! And now know more than most people about Achill Island and the acoustic nerve.

years, if she continues to claw at my legs and head in a desperate attempt to get attention and/or love, which is hard to come by when you look like a shriveled handbag. I don't mind how long it takes, as I happen to love writing almost as much as I enjoy reading.

There is a chance that this book will become a bestseller and I'll become rich and famous! Of course, there is also a chance that Prince X will land in my backyard in his own private helicopter and whisk me away to his palace, which is to say, there is no chance at all. Sadness.

So, back to "aa," which was what I was doing before I had to stop to explain to you about the encyclopedia. "AA" (all caps) is also a battery type and a bra (of no) size and what you shout after a volcano erupts and you are running for your life from the river of jaggedy lava, as in "AAAAH! THE AA!"

That's not something you'd read in a regular encyclopedia, trust me.

This is *not* a regular encyclopedia.

It's better.

Aardvark

Apart from beginning with two As, and thus being as fantabulicious as "aa" and "Aaron-Martin," the most noteworthy thing about aardvarks is that an aardvark is the mascot of my sad, crumply little school, Cortez Junior High.

I wish I was making a joke, but I'm not. Not about the relative crumpliness of the school itself, and certainly not about the pure, unadulterated sadosity of having an aardvark in your cheering section. It's very hard to get enthused about a sport when the thing that is cheering you on is a giant, slow-moving,

piglike mammal that in real life drags itself on stubby legs through hot sandy deserts, snuffling ants, and hoping to die.²

Inexplicably, it was decided that this creature should also be purple. As you might have guessed, my school places last in most sporting events. In comparison, the mascot of our chief rival, the Prescott School for the Unnaturally Athletic, winners of every sporting event they have ever taken part in, is a large and ferocious, normal-colored lion.

You *never* want to get a detention on game days. Because then you have to wear the Aardie suit and spend hours running for your life from the (not) hilarious antics of the Prescott Lion. It is like being mauled by a vicious carnivore with paws the size of tennis rackets while entombed in a cocoon of stale sweaty socks and old spitballs as your so-called friends die too young from fits of laughter while occasionally shouting your name and whistling.

Aaron, Baxter (Dad)

My dad, Bax Aaron, is a plumber. Nobody calls Dad “Baxter.” He says that “Baxter” sounds like the name of either a fat orange cat or a manservant on a British comedy, and he is neither, although he’d not-so-secretly have liked to be on a British (or any) comedy. Dad spent his whole life wanting to be an actor on TV. But he’s a plumber because his dad was a plumber and so plumbing was his thing to fall back on. The moral of this semi-tragic story is that you should probably make your “thing to fall back on” a lot more fun than plumbing. (Unless you enjoy plumbing, in which case, you should go for it.)

Dad is completely movie-star good-looking, so why he is not a famous actor is a mystery to most. Everywhere we go,

2. I assume all aardvarks are suicidal. Because, really, what do they have to live for?

women eyeball Dad like they wish they could capture him and keep him forever, like a piece of art or a hunk of cheese. Dad is generally oblivious and/or is very good at acting oblivious, more evidence of his incredible and overlooked talents.

Dad likes salads featuring tiny cobs of corn, Rollerblading, motorcycles, and reggae. He says reggae is his people's music, but I am one of his people and I don't like reggae at all. Frequently, he can be found dancing to the reggae that plays in his head, making him resemble a deranged person with an uncontrollable twitch disorder. He knows how to play a banjo, a guitar, a ukulele, and a strange stringed thing that is called a lute. He is quite brilliant musically, another gift I did not receive in the gene lottery.

Dad is British, and yes, he has an accent. He is African-American,³ except not American. In Britain, they say "African-Caribbean." Dad would never say "African-Caribbean-American-Jamaican" or whatever. "Black" is an OK thing to say, at least in our family. Other families feel differently, or so I hear. The worst word is "colored." Don't ever say that unless you want to get punched directly in the stomach by me. I'd punch your nose, but I likely can't reach it, especially if you're tall, unless I stand on a chair, and you'd probably escape before I got properly positioned.

And NEVER say the *n* word. Not even jokingly. If you've ever said it, shut this book right now and get out of here. OUT.

3. Dad's dad is Jamaican. His mom is from St. Lucia, but actually she was born in England. It's complicated, except I guess it really isn't, as that's all there is to it. If they were white people from Poland and South Dakota, no one would be oohing and aaahing at the exoticness of Dad's heritage, and Mom and Dad would just be a regular white couple who no one stared at in restaurants.