

North Carolina

I decided that I wanted to be a writer today. The thought popped into my head while I was sitting and listening to my dad babble during our visit to the prison where he currently resides. Every few months or so, my mom, brother and I drag our asses down to bumble fuck, middle of nowhere, Butner, North Carolina to visit my father who seems to be thoroughly enjoying his stay in a five star federal prison. All he does all day is, nothing. So far, six months into his stay, he's learned how to read palms, tackle people in flag football, and write the first 150 pages of his politically satirical action packed novel about the prisoners. What the fuck. He's got 13.5 years left of being a totally dispensable part of society.

I was sitting across from my father, who had shaved all of the hair on his head and face other than his mustache... in a successful attempt to humor us I suspect, and I listened to him tell us one of his cheesy, overdramatic, unentertaining stories in his usual story telling manner. It was while he was frantically flinging his arms around as he told us about his Caucasian cell mate who traveled to Indian and became a Buddhist yogi, and amidst the spit that was flying from his jacked up Soviet Union teeth and hitting the royal blue molded plastic chairs that Charles Eames would have thrown up on, that I realized the irony of life. I simultaneously wanted to laugh and throw up. But instead I decided that I had to share all of this with the world, so I chose to write.

Before we start with the best part of this specific trip down to North Carolina from Philadelphia with my godforsaken family, I must inform you of the events that occurred just days before.

To paint a picture of my mother I must tell you about her teeth. While my mom was pregnant with her second child, ME, her rotten Soviet Union teeth could not withstand the amount of calcium that my little fetus body sucked from her body. This topped with her secret plan to bath my body in an acidic shower of raw lemon juice everyday to ensure I was as unhealthy as possible, literally made all of her teeth disintegrate like the buildings in Chernobyl. Every single tooth in her vile mouth is fake. Although her veneers could pay for a slightly used 2003 Toyota Corolla, she still refuses to properly brush and floss them. A habit I suspect she picked up in the third world country in which she resided for the majority of her life. Therefore, her teeth are just as repulsive as they were in 1993 when she lived in a country where dentists didn't exist.

So as usual, two days before our departure to North Carolina my mom attempts to get her shit together at the salon. Somehow the hairdresser manages to get her hair, which is (with no exaggerations) the consistence and color of hay, to sit on her head in a somewhat more acceptable fashion. She gets her nails painted her favorite shade of purple and she leaves the salon a new woman.

Again as usual, and I cannot stress how usual this specific usual is, my mom is late leaving the salon and has to rush to pick my brother up from the Trenton Train station, where around 11pm the hobos come out to play. In my personal opinion my mother is legally blind at night and during the day, which makes getting anywhere on time close to impossible. A drive that my mother has made nearly 30 times is still new territory, every time.

My brother calls after the first half hour of waiting and yells at this poor blind woman to hurry up. As she hangs up the telephone, she steps on the gas and not even 30 seconds later; sirens go off behind her car. She frantically steps on the break, juts her head forward and tightly clenches her jaw.

This is a woman who has lived in America for over 20 years but still gets nervous speaking English to a cashier at a grocery store. Imagine her and her teeth at this moment. As the cop approaches her, she rolls down the window and opens her mouth to speak. The offensive yellow tooth just slips between her lips, hits the door panel and trickles down to the floor like a pinball.

I assume at this point that the police officer cannot contain himself and breaks into uncontrollable laughter as he walks back to his car and drives away while laughing and pointing at my mom. But no one can ever be sure of the events that took place afterwards. Either way, everyone gets away unscathed, other than my mom's front tooth.

And so I travel down south with a six foot three Jewish hipster, my racially ambiguous Mexican meatball of an uncle, and my heroin addict look-a-like mother. We slowly walk in a single line through the airport like the moments before an epic fight scene is about to ensue in a Quentin Tarantino film. As we enter the gate, all 20 people on our flight stare at us like a little kid stares at the turtles fucking at the zoo. The four of us clearly don't belong in North Carolina, except for my toothless mother.

The only person that seems slightly unfazed by my mother is the owner of the motel in the middle of nowhere North Carolina. I suppose he is used to the crack heads that most likely frequent this Econolodge. He gives us 10 dollars off each night of our stay in a motel that you have mostly likely seen on a few episodes of the hit TV show Cops.

Secretly, I fall in love with the look of the perfectly symmetrical two-story building with repetitive saturated red doors and windows. Its dark brown railings cast a perfect striped shadow diagonally across the entire outside hallway. As I walk down and watch my shadow break each dark strip on the cement ground I feel like I'm floating above the impediment. I traverse the cracks of the asphalt in the parking lot below and see the tumble weeds of Death Valley float by. It's an oddly blue day; the sky is the type of blue gradient that goes from blue collar to royalty, flawlessly. This is only possible with the burning radiance of the sun, as yellow as mom's teeth, beating down on my skin in the middle of December; an unfamiliar feeling. I feel less shitty than you would expect a 21 year old with a father in jail and a toothless mother to feel.

We get to the prison and receive the same exact reaction as the scene at the airport. Realistically expect that reaction anytime the four of us walk into any type of institution or establishment in North Carolina. After completing the very uneventful formalities of entering a low security federal prison, my dad greets us in the visitation room with a smile I don't think I've seen on the man's face in any of my recent memories. Despite his hilariously unfortunate landing in prison, which I will explain at some point, my most recent memories of my father as a free man paint him in a troubled light. It was not easy to watch this man's spiral into a bottomless pit of drugs and alcohol, a story I'm sure you've seen portrayed many a time.

This was the first time I could remember seeing this guy's smokey black teeth revealed in a full-fledged smile. This was the first time in a long time that the five of us sat there and listened to my dad use his imagination and come up with one of his magically fantastic crazy ass stories.

The last time I remember feeling this closeness and comfort amongst my family was five years back when my boogie father made reservations at a fancy New York City restaurant, where we proceeded to all get drunk and make fun of the posh crowd inside. We made fun of the fancy waiter whose sole purpose was to supply us with 15 different types of bread with his little lips

pursed behind his fancy mustache. As we sat in those horrid blue chairs and all laughed at my dad's white Buddhist yogi cellmate I realized that nothing had changed. Time had passed between those two moments, memories had been made and forgotten, paths forked and decisions were made, it brought all of us to be where we were today; sitting in those perfectly formed blue chairs.