

SNEAKING OUT

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IT WAS THE BIG DINNER OF OUR WHOLE FAMILY. ALL MY COUSINS, AUNTS AND UNCLES, AND THE LUDERMYERS FROM NEXT DOOR CARRIED IN FOOD, FOOD, FOOD.



TEN MILLION TONS OF FOOD WRAPPED IN ALCOA AND SARAN WRAP. THEN, BEFORE WE COULD EAT, MR. LUDERMYER MADE A TOAST TO MY DAD.



PRAISE GOD!

TO RAY.
YOU HAD A
LONG ROW TO
HOE, BUT
GOD DAMN IT,
YOU HOED IT.

BEST GOD DAMN
EMPLOYEE I GOT.

THE PARTY WAS FOR HIM QUITTING DRINKING. MY GRANDMA STARTED CRYING AND HUGGING MY DAD. SHE KEPT GIVING ME AND MY SISTER THE SIGNAL TO CRY AND HUG OUR DAD TOO.



HEY C'MON.

WHAT.

WE GOTTA
GO STAND
BY DAD.

HEY.

WHAT?

SHE KEPT GIVING OUR UNCLE JOHN THE SIGNAL TO TAKE THE PICTURES AND MY AUNT WILDA KEPT GIVING THE SIGNAL FOR EVERYONE ELSE TO QUIT STARING AND START EATING.



AFTER DINNER EVERYBODY SAT OUT IN THE BACKYARD LISTENING TO MOSTLY MR. LUDERMYER TALKING.



YEP.
I'VE SEEN
A LOT OF THINGS
IN MY TIME. YEP.
I'VE DONE MY SHARE
OF LIVING.

MY GRANDMA SAID DAD OWED HIS LIFE
TO THAT MAN. MR. LUDERMYER WHO
HELPED HIM OUT. MR. LUDERMYER WHO
GAVE HIM THAT JOB.



I WATCHED HOW MR. LUDERMYER KEPT
PUTTING HIS ARM AROUND MY DAD
AND HOW MY DAD KEPT DRINKING
MORE PEPSI, MORE PEPSI, MORE PEPSI.



THEN MY DAD STOOD UP AND PULLED OUT HIS CAR KEYS. "WHERE YOU GOING, RAY?" MY GRANDMA SAID. "CIGARETTES" MY DAD SAID.



"CHRIST, I MAY AS WELL COME WITH YOU" MR. LUDERMYER SAID. "BLOW THE DUST OFF OF ME." HE WAS GIVING MY GRANDMA A LOOK.



"NAW" SAID MY DAD. "I'LL BE RIGHT BACK" MY GRANDMA STOOD UP. "BRING THE KIDS WITH YOU, RAY." SHE SAID.



BUT HE WAS ALREADY DOWN THE DRIVEWAY. ALREADY DOWN THE DARK STREET.

