

**SARAH
COLONNA**

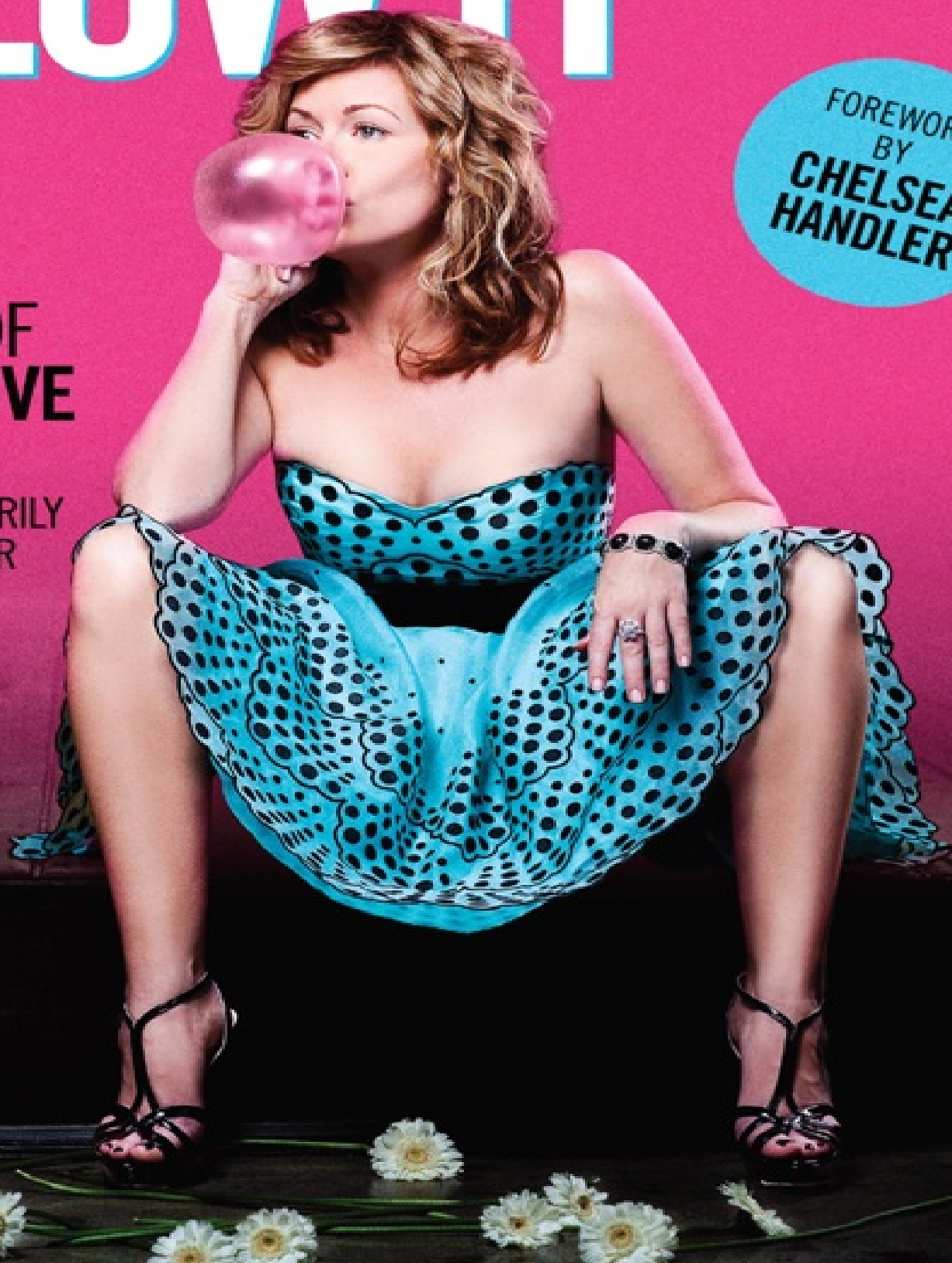
BLOW IT

AS I

FOREWORD
BY
**CHELSEA
HANDLER**

**TALES OF
LIFE, LOVE
& SEX...**

NOT NECESSARILY
IN THAT ORDER





LIFE AS I **BLOW IT**

TALES OF LOVE,
LIFE & SEX...
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Life as I Blow It is a work of nonfiction. Some names and identifying details have been changed. Any resulting resemblance to any persons living or dead is coincidental and unintentional.

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*What I had in mind was spending the night
with a stranger who loves me*

—DUDLEY MOORE, *Arthur* (1981)

Sarah Colonna believes that just because she dislodged her ass from Fayetteville, Arkansas and moved all the way to Los Angeles, she no longer deserves to work at a fast-food chain called Chucky's. She is wrong. I don't know if there is a fast-food chain called Chucky's, but if there is, that's where she deserves to be.

I met Sarah at an improvisation class in the Valley when we were both twenty-one years old. We were magnetically drawn to each other because we both looked like we were in our mid-forties. The class was an embarrassment of riches and a testament that everything happens for a reason. Had I not looked to a sixty-year-old wannabe actor/comic for direction in weaving the name of a city and a profession, yelled out by another classmate, into a hilarious Southwest-level comedy bit, I would never have seen Sarah in her underwear. We have smoked cigarettes while wearing our Invisalign. Well, I was wearing mine, but she needs it.

Shortly after I met Sarah she inherited a cat from a male friend of hers who died. I felt bad that her friend had died, but I couldn't wrap my head around the idea of keeping someone else's cat. I knew she had to be from the South or the Midwest, and at the time both of those areas meshed together in my mind, so it really didn't matter. What mattered is that she kept that cat and it is still fucking alive.

We spent a lot of time together drinking excessively and waiting tables to pay for the former. She drove a smelly white Mustang with doors the size of chaise lounges and I drove a Toyota Echo. Both of those cars survived a lot of fast food, a lot of alcohol spilling, a lot of men, a lot of drive-bys, and a lot of fender benders that were not reported to the LAPD.

She paired that feculent Mustang with a horrifying haircut that I imagined you would find on a secretary from Omaha who worked full-time at a potato plant. I told her repeatedly to let her hair grow out, especially after I saw her license picture once, when we were both proving to each other how old we actually were. She had long blond hair when she was in college at the University of Arkansas and looked ten times better than the girl whose glass eyes I was barely staring into. We were both drunk on her bed wondering why no one thought we were our actual age. At thirty-five we still have the same problem, so the idea that you grow into it is a complete lie.

We started doing stand-up together somewhere around 1997 and one of us would stop, and then start again, then one of us would stop; then we'd start again. The problem is we hurried out so much that our stand-up was too much alike and people would get us confused all the time. All we both talked about was drinking and being broken up with by AM/PM mini-managementers. We both kind of hated it, but knew there was really no other option for either one of us to get anywhere in life in the real world, and we were both too lazy to change our material. Sarah had more of an acting background. I had more of a bad-attitude background. Our biggest priority was fun and Sarah is probably the funniest person I know and I happened to know a lot of funny people. Unfortunately, none of them are the people I work with.

Cut to almost fifteen years and ten boyfriends later. She and I get to work together ever

day and I have forced her to share an office with one of the loudest Jewish eaters in the history of West Los Angeles. She is a huge part of *Chelsea Lately* and *After Lately* and is by far the most popular person in the office. Everyone loves Sarah. She is my favorite and she will be yours, too. If I write any more, this will start to sound like a eulogy. We've come a long way from using our debit cards at Del Taco. We both only eat organic Mexican now, excluding every other Thursday, when Chuy has us over for brunch.

Cover
Title Page
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Epigraph

SLOPPY SARAH:
A FOREWORD by Chelsea Handler

WHERE DO I START?
HOW MANY POLACKS DOES IT TAKE TO RUIN A MARRIAGE?
VOLUN-TEARS
HYMEN GO SEEK
FRIENDS WITHOUT BENEFITS
ALCOHOL IS FOR CLOSURES
CABO WOBBLE
TRUNDLE BEDS AND MASTURBATORS
HELL CAT
THE LIST
BIKINI ROCK BOTTOM
REALLY BAD HAIR DAY
LIAR, LIAR, PANTS ON FIRE
DIRTY THIRTY
THE CUSTOMER IS NEVER RIGHT
MOVE IT OR LOSE IT
ALONE TIME
CLOSING ARGUMENT

Dedication
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
About the Author

I'm sitting alone in my apartment with a big glass of vodka next to me. I've filled it three times so far, and it's only 4 P.M. Whatever, it's Sunday.

I'm trying to figure out how to start this book. I've ended it, but I haven't started it. That's how I do a lot of things. I get to the end of a meal much faster than I should, like I've been given the last hamburger on earth and someone is about to rob me. I walk like I'm being chased. I tend to fuck first and ask questions later.

I'm thirty-six years old, but I don't feel like it. Some days I feel like I'm twenty-one, some days I feel like I'm pushing sixty. I work really hard and because of that I believe I should be able to play really hard. It's not easy to find a guy who can handle that. It's also not easy to find a guy who doesn't mind that at one point in my life, I slept with somebody named "Paul's friend."

To the naked eye, I'm completely responsible. I pay my bills not only on time, but early. I return emails and phone calls in a prompt manner. I won't go near an egg that is one second past its expiration date. I've always known what I want to do with my life professionally. But if you ask me what I want in my personal life, forget it.

I always wanted to get married, until it looked like someone might want to marry me. I was sure I didn't want kids, then for a couple of months I wanted kids, then a couple of months later I thought kids were horrible. I loved someone so much that I broke up with him because I didn't want to get hurt. Then when he proved he loved me back, I broke up with him again. I'm a fucking mess, but so are you. Most of us are. I don't just mean women. Men are a mess, too. We're all in this together.

We all have two very different personalities living inside us and sometimes those personalities are at war with each other. It's confusing to see what two completely different paths can offer you. My mom showed me that if you lived close to your family, you always had a birthday party. You also always had a big Thanksgiving dinner, a big Christmas, an Easter egg hunt. Maybe those events became annoying, but you always knew you could rely on them. And you always had each other.

My dad showed me that if you went off on your own, you could have the career that you always wanted. Your family might change with each marriage and you might have to move around, feel alone for a while, and make new friends, but you'd always be climbing the ladder. Plus you could go on really nice vacations and stay in hotels with nice comfy robes that could be yours for the reasonable price of eighty-nine dollars.

I'm somewhere in the middle. I want both. Or I want it all. Or I only want part of both. I don't know. I just know that you don't always end up happy with what you thought would make you happy. You've probably been there a time or two yourself. You can't always wait for what you get.

HOW MANY POLACKS DOES IT TAKE TO RUIN A MARRIAGE

At the time of my parents' divorce, I was five years old and we were all living in Dallas. Lori came into our lives soon after. My mom's family was in Arkansas; she went there to look for a place for us to live so that she'd have a support system now that she was going to be a single mom. While she was gone, Lori stayed at our house in Dallas. She didn't seem to have many housekeeping skills, so I knew she wasn't a maid. Dad also suggested we didn't mention the amount of time Lori spent at our house to Mom, so I knew she wasn't a friendly gal pal. It all seemed to tie together to the time that Mom locked the dead bolt on the front door and then broke a broomstick in half and shoved it into the track of our back sliding-glass door. It was pretty late, so I asked her if she was scared that someone was going to break in. She just smiled and told me to go to bed. I woke up later when my dad tried to climb through the window and didn't fit. The next day, when I asked Dad why he got home after midnight he told me that he had worked late with Lori. This woman was around at really inconvenient times.

My older sister, Jennifer, and I were flower girls in Dad and Lori's wedding. Neither of us was too pumped up about the event, but we showed up and did our jobs. I didn't like weddings to begin with. I found them long and boring and it cut into the time I would normally spend playing "Charlie's Angels" with my sister. She was brunette, so she played Jaclyn Smith's character. I was awesome, so I played Cheryl Ladd's. The third Angel we just pretended was on vacation, because nobody we lived near wanted to be Kate Jackson. We had water guns and a telephone that didn't work so that we could report to "Charlie." Since we didn't have a brother, we considered ourselves very lucky that on the show nobody ever saw Charlie.

This wedding in particular really had me in a foul mood. I didn't like my new stepmom. She was annoying and made me eat some sort of salmon dish with the skin around it which she said things like "one day your mom and I will be the best of friends." I'd stare at her, try to count in my head all of the times my mom had called her a slut, spit my dinner into a napkin, and vow to hate her forever. She was also Polish, which made for lots of fun Polack jokes for Jennifer and me. Dad didn't find them amusing.

I tried to display my distaste for their union. I refused to eat cake at the reception, which at six was my way of saying "fuck you." The whole thing took place in my old backyard where I used to live with my family in Dallas. Now it was my dad's house with a new woman who sucked and had a jacked-up nose. Lori made Jennifer and me wear brown floral skirts that went past our knees and off-white shirts that buttoned so high up the neck I thought I was going to choke to death. I went to my old room right after they exchanged vows, and on the way I mentioned to a dozen people that Lori's nostrils were a lot bigger than my mom's.

"If you'd like to see a photo comparison, I have one ready," I told one of my dad's construction workers. Nobody bit on the offer. Just as well, I needed to get to sleep. I was going back to Arkansas the next day and I needed all of my energy for wowing the flight attendants with my wit. "What has four legs and won't live longer than two years?" I'd ask them. One woman

would guess a hamster; the other would be so stumped she wouldn't even have a guess. I smile proudly and deliver the punch line perfectly: "My dad's new marriage!"

I was hilarious. I made my first mental note to myself to become a comedian when I grew up.

By the way, their marriage lasted about two years. The day Dad asked me, "How do you get a one-armed Polack out of a tree?" I knew it was over.

When they separated, Lori sent letters to my sister and me asking if we could stay in touch and still be friends. I guess she didn't realize we weren't friends when she and Dad were married. I thought I had made it obvious that I never liked her. I made a mental note to make that more clear to people in the future.

While it only took my dad a handful of months to remarry, my mom was not interested in dating. She was a single mom living in Fayetteville, Arkansas. She was too busy working and raising us to care about finding a man. She probably also hated men for a while, but I was old enough to figure that out yet.

After the divorce, her first job was at a school cafeteria. She refused to work at our school because she thought we'd be embarrassed. I told her of course I wouldn't be embarrassed that my mom was a lunch lady, then ran to my room and thanked God that she had chosen a different school. I also apologized to Him for lying to her, but it seemed like a necessary one.

After a bit of prodding from some friends, Mom decided to join a singles' group. In my mind it wasn't a good idea. I don't know if they even have those anymore; I think online dating has replaced them. Later on in the book, you'll find out why I think online dating sucks ass. Stick with me here, it's a really humiliating story. I promise.

I pictured my mom's singles' group taking place in one of those weird banquet rooms at a hotel. There's a long table set up in front covered with name tags. Mom walks up and finds hers: HELLO, MY NAME IS CHERYL. She pins it to her red mock turtleneck, smooths out her Lands' End slacks, and nervously walks into the room. She immediately heads for the refreshment table and scans the contents—coffee and donuts—then fixes herself a cup of decaf; she doesn't want to get too wound up. She notices a couple of people looking at her. *Oh, good, people are already noticing me.* She starts to relax, then finds their gazes to be strange. It feels like they are smirking, laughing. *Oh, no,* she thinks to herself. *They must all know that my husband left me and that he is already remarried. I must smell like a victim.* She starts thinking that this was a terrible idea. *Why did I let anybody talk me into this? What the hell am I doing here?* she wonders. She starts to feel dizzy. She looks around frantically for the ladies' room. She walks briskly to the restroom; she just needs a minute to compose herself. She runs in and finds the bathroom empty. *Thank God, a minute alone.* She walks to the sink and turns on the faucet. She runs cold water over her hands and then onto her face. As she rises from the sink she opens her eyes to look at herself in the mirror. Horror washes over her. She forgot to take off her hair net after work. She rips it off, throws it in the trash, and leaves the hotel. *Maybe next time,* she decides as she makes her way to her car.

At least that's what I always imagined it was like. I watch a lot of Lifetime movies.

At some point she found her groove in the group. She had a few dates with a couple of different people. Mom had become friends with some of the other women, and one of them tipped her off to someone who could babysit us while she went out. I don't remember the babysitter's name. I just know I called her "Penny," which was short for *Pentecostal*, because

well, she was Pentecostal. I didn't really know what that was at the time. My mom was Methodist and my dad was busy. I went to church from time to time with Mom but there wasn't much to our religion. Everybody was nice and it didn't seem like there were a ton of rules. The preacher did a sermon, a couple of hymns were sung, someone passed around the offering tray, and we were out. Pretty basic. That was not the case with Penny. She took her religion very, very seriously. She refused to cut her hair; I think she thought it was a direct line to God. It was long and stringy and almost touched the ground, kind of like Crystal Gayle but without the hit records. From what I could tell, her religion didn't like skin, because she wore long, straight skirts and shirts that buttoned all the way up to her chin. Her outfits kind of reminded me of what I had to wear when Dad married Lori.

When I first met Penny I asked Mom if she was Amish, but Mom told me never to ask Penny that to her face. So the next time I saw her, I asked. She told me that she was not Amish, but thanked me for the interest in her life.

"I'm Pentecostal," she continued. "Would you like me to explain to you what my religion is?"

"Maybe next time. I'm pretty wiped," I lied. God immediately got me back because now I had committed to going to bed at 7 P.M.

One night Mom had a date on a Wednesday. That was Penny's church night, so she was never available to sit for us. Mom called her anyway, thinking maybe just this one time she would need the money and skip church. Obviously Mom had never really paid any attention to Penny because she would *never* miss church. Unfortunately for me, my previous inquiry into Penny's religion had stuck in her mind. She told Mom that she would gladly watch Jennifer and me. She'd just take us to church with her. I couldn't believe I had to go to church on Wednesday night. This seemed unfair.

"We have to go to church so that you can go on a date!" I yelled in as high a pitch as I could get my voice to. It doesn't go that high. I'm often confused for a man on the phone.

"That's right," my mom said. Her newfound confidence was getting annoying.

"Well, maybe I don't want to go. Maybe I'll go live with Dad."

"Okay, say hi to Lori for me."

Shit. Mom is getting good.

Penny's church was nothing like I had imagined. When we walked in, I began to wonder how all these people had the time to go shopping together. Every single person was dressed the same. Long skirts, button-up shirts, and the same color pants on the men. There was hair everywhere. Some wore it in buns, others let it drag on the floor. I figured they must all have pretty decent jobs if they were able to afford the shampoo it requires for the upkeep.

We filed into a pew and waited for things to start. I was already antsy—like I was alone in a foreign country and I didn't speak the language. Things started off kind of normal. The preacher started talking, reading, talking. It was all par for the course. Just when I thought that it was going to be no big deal, things started to turn. The preacher asked people to come forward if they needed to be "saved" or if they wanted to renew their vow to God. Doves and people started making their way down the aisle. Suddenly they were crying, yelling, singing. Some people didn't even make it to the front of the church. They just fell on their knees and started wailing. Their hands were in the air, reaching up to God. But they were mostly just flailing. My sister and I looked at each other in a mixture of horror, confusion, and humor.

What is going on? I looked up to Penny thinking maybe she'd be ready to bail since clearly a lot of her church buddies had gone insane, but she just stared straight ahead and nodded. At one point I noticed a single tear run down her cheek. That was it—she had lost her mind. I gripped the pew and braced myself. I knew in my heart that the whole place was about to burst into flames, or I was about to be entered into a cult and never heard from again.

"Mom better at least be getting laid for this," Jennifer whispered to me.

"EWW! Don't say that!" I was horrified. For many years I was a big prude compared to my sister. That changed around the time I developed a taste for Wild Turkey.

Eventually things died down. The service came to an end and as far as I could tell nobody had passed away during all the drama. Penny led my sister and me out to her car, where the two of us waited patiently for an explanation. I had it all figured out: Outside of her appearance, Penny seemed pretty normal when she was watching us. There was no way that she brought us to this circus knowing that her friends were going to lose their shit. Obviously she couldn't say anything in the church; they probably knew where she lived. She was just going through the motions, then when she got us in the car, she'd tell us that she'd never seen anything like that in her life and that she was so sorry that everyone at her church got possessed at the same time, especially on the night we had to go with her. "What a bunch of freaks!" she'd say, laughing.

Penny turned the engine on and looked at us in the rearview mirror. She gave us a knowing smile and asked, "Who wants ice cream?"

That night I waited up for my mom. I was usually in bed early; the anxious adult me hadn't crept in yet to convince myself that six hours of sleep was plenty. As a kid I knew I needed my brain rest so that I could get straight A's, go to college, and make a bunch of money so that I could get out of this town.

"What are you still doing up?" Mom asked.

"Couldn't sleep. How was your night?"

"It was all right. How was yours?" she replied.

"Penny and the people who go to her church are bananas. You sent us to an insane asylum. If you ever have a date on a Wednesday night again, don't. Night!"

With that I went off to bed.

Mom's singles' group seemed to be restoring some of her self-confidence and she decided she no longer wanted to work at a cafeteria. She started looking for a new job and quickly found one at a funeral home, where she became a secretary. She didn't have to touch dead bodies, but it was still creepy. She would come home and make dinner and talk about how "busy" it was, which just meant that lots of people had died. My sister and I were not really into her work talk, and I think she took offense at it. I was really proud of her for getting a good job, and I was really glad she felt more security. But sorry—I was trying to eat.

For a while when we were living in Fayetteville we lived next door to two guys who were close in age to my sister and me. They became our best friends, and one had the honor of my first tongue kiss. His name was Kevin and I liked him so much that I named my first goldfish after him. He was super cute and he told funny stories. The neighbor, not the goldfish. The goldfish didn't say much. I had found my true love, and I was only eight.

Kevin was really popular in school. He pretty much ran our elementary homeroom and all the girls liked him. I counted myself lucky to have tied down such a free spirit. It also

worked out well that we were neighbors. He walked me home—well, his house was first, so he'd stop there, and I'd walk the next four houses alone. It was okay, though. My expectations were pretty low to begin with, so it seemed like he was doing a great job as my first boyfriend.

Although my love life was in great shape, there still weren't any prospects panning out for my mom from the singles' group. I felt kind of bad that I was eight years old and in love while my thirty-three-year-old mom was struggling to want to go on a second date.

During one of the busy afternoons at my mom's work, a guy who made the flower deliveries for the funeral home struck up a conversation with her. He found her charming and sweet and wondered if she was available. She looked at the ring on his hand then shot him a disapproving look.

"No, not for me," he said with a laugh. "My wife would kill me. But you should meet my friend Eric."

When my mom met Eric, I was skeptical. Things were going smoothly. Jennifer and I had settled in as "latchkey kids" and Mom had stopped talking about dead bodies during supper. I wasn't sure I wanted someone else in the mix. But he won me over fairly quickly; he was pretty easy to like. He used words like *reckon* and *plumb* (as in: "That house is plumb out in the middle of nowhere" and "I reckon we need to get some gas"). I'm still not sure what those words mean, but at the same time I am. No matter what was in his vocabulary, I could tell he was incredibly smart. He spewed out historical and political facts, but for a living he worked at Tyson Foods. He also knew a lot about geography, and I still can't read a map. So I was impressed, *and* I had someone to help me with my homework.

My mom had a pretty bad overbite, and since she was falling in love she decided to have it fixed. That decision resulted in her mouth being wired shut for about six weeks, which was awesome. My mom really likes to talk, so this was the equivalent of taking brunch away from a gay man. The only word she could say clearly was *shit*, and she had to eat all her food through a straw. She'd make Jennifer and me nice dinners, then suck sadly on a green shake.

The best part of her not being able to talk was that she couldn't tell us to do chores. She'd try, but we'd just say we couldn't understand her and then erupt in giggles. The use of the word *shit* would then start flowing, I think preceded by *you little* but I couldn't quite make it out. Eric was a real trouper through that whole thing. I think he just enjoyed the quiet.

When they decided to get married, it was announced that we'd have to move. We were living in Fayetteville and they wanted to buy a house together a few miles away in the small town of Farmington. Moving to Farmington meant we had to change schools.

My head exploded. *What the hell are they thinking?* My relationship with Kevin was really starting to flourish. Just the week before, he had apologized for not taking me to the Valentine's Day dance. He finally agreed that it was weird that I went alone and that when I got there he ignored me. He was really sorry! How could I move away and go to a new school when we'd just worked through our first huge fight and were going to be stronger than ever? I was really starting to make some headway here, and for once I'd stuck up for myself. I made him promise not to ignore me in public anymore. I even told him that if he did it one more time I wouldn't allow him to ever walk me halfway home from school again.

Shortly after I got the news that my life was being dismantled, I walked up to Kevin's house to tell him. I was envisioning his tears and heartache; it would be very dramatic. When

I got close to his yard, I noticed that Kevin and his brother were throwing something around like a football, so I assumed it was a football. As I got closer I stopped in my tracks. The football was making a lot of noise. It was meowing. The football was a cat.

I ran to him in tears and demanded that he stop throwing the cat. He laughed and continued to torture the defenseless animal. I managed to step in the middle, which only made me become part of an involuntary game of keep-away. I'm not sure keep-away is even voluntary; I just know that it's really frustrating. After a while I managed to get the cat away and I ran with him in my arms to my house while shouting back over my shoulder that I was going to call the ASPCA on him. I was really impressed with myself for knowing what the ASPCA was. Eric had told me.

I ran home and tearfully told my mother the story. She looked at me with sad eyes and patted me on the head for saving the cat from those assholes. She didn't say anything, not because she was speechless but because her mouth was still wired shut. We fed the cat some mystery meat dish that my mother had made the night before—she's got a lot of great qualities, but cooking is not one of them, though many say the same about me—then dialed the number on his collar and returned him to his owners, who promised they would never use him as a football.

When I got to my room I noticed that Kevin, my goldfish, was floating at the top of his bowl. He was dead, and now to me so was the other Kevin. It all came full circle. I buried the goldfish in a little box and dramatically said goodbye to Kevin my first boyfriend and Kevin the Goldfish. The next day I found out through Jennifer's taunting that I could have just flushed the fish, which pissed me off further at Kevin the boyfriend for once again wasting my time, since I blamed him for the death of my beloved fish. Even though he had nothing to do with it.

I gave up on my fight to stay in Fayetteville at Happy Hollow Elementary. Since I had broken it off with Kevin, I had little reason to want to stay in that school district. Now I was the one ignoring him and it was really awkward for everyone in our homeroom. I was ready for a change. I had so many other things I wanted to do, places I wanted to see, and relationships I wanted to develop. It's like when you're in your thirties and you realize you haven't done half of the things you always said you'd do ... but you're eight.

I currently live in Los Angeles. I work on a late-night talk show and I do stand-up several weekends out of the year. I don't have kids and thus far the only person I've felt really comfortable living with is myself. And sometimes I'm not a big fan of her, either.

I live what some might consider to be a pretty great life. Others probably think that it's selfish, or that I'm missing something. It's tough for me to say who is right and who is wrong. Because where I come from and where I am now are two very different places.

In Los Angeles, I often go to the Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf with my friend Jackie at noon on Saturdays because we know that the firefighters from Station 19 are going to be there at that time for a coffee fix. They're fun to look at. In Farmington, Arkansas, firefighters look different. They look like my family. Mostly because they *are* my family.

If your mother's entire family was deeply involved in a volunteer fire department, you probably would have moved away from Arkansas, too. At one point my grandmother, Phyllis, was the fire chief, and she wasn't even a lesbian. She just liked being in charge. Everyone else in my family, besides me, was a volunteer firefighter. It's something they're all very proud of. As a teenager who just wanted to get felt up, I found it all pretty annoying. As a semi-mature adult, I'm now proud to say my family saves lives. So maybe stop judging me now and let's try and get along for the rest of the book.

Most of the other members of the Wedington Volunteer Fire Department (the name Farmington was already taken by the town's professional fire department; we had to settle for naming ours after a street) served on the mysterious "board." They had monthly meetings, and if someone didn't show up, my mom sure talked shit about them. I knew that being a volunteer meant you also had to have a real job, so I would suggest to her that some people were probably just too tired to make it to the meetings after a long day at work. My mom would argue back that those people probably should not volunteer to fight fires, then.

"Would you want to depend on someone who can't even show up for a monthly meeting to save your house if it was burning down?" she'd ask me.

"I guess not."

The whole thing was pretty cutthroat, and way too much of a commitment for me.

There were several side projects that the fire department had going in order to keep afloat, one being the fire department cookbook. As we got older, my sister, Jennifer, began to contribute recipes. I did not. Like I said, I've never been much of a cook. I cook for myself sometimes, but it doesn't taste very good. It actually tastes pretty awful. I prefer to dine out. My family likes to make fun of me, indicating that being able to cook is part of what makes a woman a woman. I disagree. Getting my period makes me a woman. Cooking just makes me bored.

Most members would submit a recipe, and all these fabulous recipes were bound together in a flimsy little booklet with a yellow cover. I think they sold them for ten dollars, which was a huge rip-off. I can't imagine how many people got the book home and realized that "Virginia's Secret Creamy Mac and Cheese" was just fucking mac-and-cheese. I mean, the recipe actually included buying a box of Kraft macaroni and cheese, then following

instructions. That seemed like cheating to me.

My mother contributed her famous original recipe for “Kung Fu Pasta.” It was something I ate a lot growing up, and I’m not going to lie ... it is delicious. It’s the one thing she made really well. It consists of spaghetti noodles, diced carrots, diced pork chop, and something green. The “Kung Fu” part came from the fact that she topped it off with soy sauce. It wasn’t until I was in my twenties that it dawned on me the name of that pasta might be slightly offensive to people, like people who do kung fu.

There are some responsibilities while living under your parents’ roof that you just can’t get out of. For me, one of those things was the fire department’s pancake breakfast. It was held at 6 A.M. a few Saturdays a year. My mom keeps telling me now that it was only once a year, but I know she’s lying to try to make my childhood sound more fun.

When the breakfast rolled around, I’d be forced to get out of bed, put on a bright yellow t-shirt that said WEDINGTON VOLUNTEERS that was three sizes too big, and serve pancakes and sausage to everyone I knew. The only other thing I did as humiliating was work at Hardee’s, but at least that paid.

My best friend in high school was Lindsay. She played basketball and I was on drill team. We liked to do the same things, like drink Busch Light and smoke Marlboro 100’s. After finally seeing the movie *Thelma & Louise*, she and I started drinking Wild Turkey. Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis drank it while on the run from the cops for a crime they really shouldn’t have been in trouble for, and they seemed to enjoy it. Wild Turkey is 101 proof, which means its alcohol content is over 50 percent, which was more than triple my age when I developed a taste for it. I liked to chase it with Coke, then when I’d run out of Coke I’d drink it straight—just like Thelma and Louise did.

Discovering bourbon at fifteen didn’t do much to help my mood when I had to show up for work pancake duty, and deal with the annoying crowd. At the time I believed that the only people who *should* wake up that early to stand in line for food that’s made in mass quantities were homeless people. But I wasn’t dealing with people in need. I was just dealing with people who were overweight, cheap, or both. And I was usually hungover.

But before all that, it took me a while to fall in love again. I was still healing from having been duped by a man who was abusive to animals and I wasn’t about to let myself fall for another liar. Men obviously pulled you in with their charm and good looks, then one day wham! You find out that it’s all been a lie and there you are on *Maury Povich* trying to warn other women of the signs that their man might be leading a double life. This is exactly what my mother must have felt like when my father left. I was really beginning to understand marriage, and I didn’t like what I saw.

Then I met Ricky Walden. We were in seventh grade together. He had a rattail haircut and he knew how to break-dance. Clearly he was *really* popular. We all gathered around him during recess while he spun around on his back and hit fake home runs with his fake baseball bat. He was amazing. I was attracted to bad boys. It wasn’t my fault.

I let Ricky finger me on a field trip. We were on the bus and it was dark. We had a blanket over us and I decided to let him go for it. Thus far the only person that had touched my vagina was me, so it was a big event to let him do so. Looking back, I can’t believe that the teachers let us cover up with a giant blanket, but maybe they noticed I was a little uptight for a seventh grader and figured I could use the release. I couldn’t wait to tell my best friend

Lindsay, the next day at school. *She's going to die! I got fingered!* This was huge.

The next day I didn't have to tell anybody—everybody already knew. Apparently Ricky had taken the time out of his busy break-dancing schedule to let everyone know what he and I had done on the bus. *What a nightmare.* I had really only planned on telling Lindsay. I was a very private person, and I was terrified of being known as a slut before I was in high school.

Once I found out that everyone knew, Lindsay and I had an emergency meeting in the bathroom. I cried hysterically. She reminded me that almost everybody else had already been fingered, except the Baptists. She was pretty sure they had, too, but that they were less honest about it. The powwow lifted my spirits and I went through the rest of the day feeling pretty good, until I walked out to catch the bus and saw Ricky letting Jimmy Thompson smear his fingers. I waited until he saw me, then I dramatically raised my middle finger and stormed off. Giving him the finger felt like poetic justice.

I heard a lot of oohs and aahs and was pretty proud of myself for once again telling a guy what was up. I went home and took the yellow sweatshirt with teddy bears on it that I had worn the night Ricky and I had our moment, and threw it in the trash. As a side note, Jimmy Thompson used to pee in his sweats. Glass house, throwing stones—that whole thing.

I'm a fan of sleep, and now I don't get enough of it. I can't even comprehend when someone tells me they have to get their "eight hours in" or else they can't function. I should sleep for seven, usually get six, and manage to function. I'm not always in a great mood, but I can function. I might have gotten the sleep problem from my dad. He tends to stay up really late and yet wake up early. I developed that same habit when I was bartending, and at thirty-something it seems to just be my pattern. As a teenager my sleep would often be interrupted by the fire scanner. That's the really annoying thing that goes off to alert volunteers that there's a fire. I once sat on a long buffet in our dining room. It was always on.

That scanner was an asshole. I swear there isn't anything more terrifying than being woken up at 3 A.M. to the crackling voice of whoever got the shitty late-night shift, which was usually whoever didn't show up for the board meeting that month. My heart would race as I'd hear the voice screaming "ATTENTION WEDINGTON VOLUNTEERS, WE GOT A BRUSH FIRE ON MILLERS ROAD!" It's a terrible way to be woken up, and it happened all of the time.

When I'd get home from school and was alone, I would sometimes turn the scanner off for an attempt at some peace and quiet. I needed to watch *General Hospital*, and I didn't need any interruptions. It worked out great for me, but not so great for my stepdad, Eric. I had gotten so wrapped up in the Quartermaines' drama one time that I had failed to turn the scanner back up on the scanner. There was a huge fire and the only person from our family who didn't show up was Eric. They all teased him the next day: "Sounds like someone had too much pie for dessert and couldn't get out of the recliner!" They were relentless.

I felt terrible. Eric was the newest member of the family and he wanted them all to know that he took the fire department seriously. I didn't feel bad enough to tell the whole family that it was my fault, though. Grandma would have killed me if she'd known I'd turned off the scanner to watch a soap opera.

I tried to apologize to Eric. "I'm really sorry you missed the fire at the Millers' house, but Robin Scorpio's boyfriend Stone grew up in the streets. He got sick and was afraid he had HIV. Today was when they gave the results."

He just walked away and went to bed.

“His test came back positive if you care! I hope they find a cure soon! Eric?”

This is the same man who offered to get a second job just to make sure I could go to college, so you'd think I could have come clean about whose fault it was, but I was a teenager and I found the whole thing really ridiculous. What was the point of volunteering? They were firefighters who got paid, after all. Let them risk their lives and let's stay home and enjoy Kung Fu Pasta like a normal family.

My family also gathered yearly to chop wood for the winter. It wasn't until I moved to California that I learned about gas fireplaces. It would have been pretty fucking nice to have had one of those growing up. I could've gotten a lot more sleep during that one Saturday in the winter and I never would have had to know what size I wore in wood-chopping gloves. My mom's side of the family obviously has a thing for fire. Maybe I shouldn't complain about something I only had to do once a year, but I was a teenager. I didn't think I should be out in the woods unless I was drinking bourbon or having teenage sex. I really needed to get out of this situation. My dad never did any manual labor, so I decided to look further into that.

Dad lived in sunny California. Visiting him in the summer was always a win-win. That was back when kids on a plane were treated like they were special. They'd let me and Jennifer, who is three years older than me, see the cockpit before takeoff and give us a pin shaped like wings. Maybe that was because my mom warned them that every time that I flew I threw up. That didn't stop until I was in college, by the way.

The flight attendants always told Jennifer and me that we were honorary co-pilots. They never took me up on my offer to actually help out when it was time for takeoff, but I was pretty sure they respected me as their peer. It always made me feel so cool. Nobody else I went to school with had that kind of experience. Sure, their families were still together, but we were racking up airline miles. And none of them knew about my compulsive vomiting.
Colonna Sisters 1, Everybody Else 0.

My dad was a newspaper sports editor. When my parents first split up, he was working for the *Dallas Morning News*. Then while I was in about the fifth grade, he got a promotion and moved to California to work at the *Orange County Register*. By the time I was in high school he had moved on to the *Los Angeles Times*. He was always moving up and his job seemed to pay well because he had a pool that was not above the ground.

I know that lots of kids from divorced families hate leaving their friends for the summer, but I wasn't one of those kids. I enjoyed spinning tales of California and the ocean and all of the movie stars' houses that I'd seen on the “Map of the Stars' Homes” tour. Sometimes a house you'd see was a bunch of trees and the tour guide would just assure you that Brad Pitt's house was on the other side, which is probably why my dad would lecture me that it was a rip-off. I didn't really care. I was fine being lied to as long as I got a relaxing trolley ride out of it. Plus, I had already decided that one day I was going to be a famous actress. I needed to familiarize myself with the neighborhood. When I did finally move to Hollywood, I couldn't afford to live in the places that they showed me on that tour. I suffered in a tiny one-bedroom with no air-conditioning. It was behind Grauman's Chinese Theatre, which is a huge tourist trap. I could barely get out of my driveway without having to brake for a guy in a worn-out Spider-Man costume who was on his way to make money by disappointing children with his dirty tights and frail figure. Finally one day I decided that I deserved better. So for now I rent a decent condo in what's known as “the Valley.” And I have central air.

One summer I took my picture with a cardboard cutout of Patrick Swayze for ten dollars across from Grauman's. It was so worth the money; I was sure that all of the morons I went to high school with would believe I had actually met Patrick Swayze. Unfortunately only one person bought my story. She was the same girl who thought that if you took a bath after sex you wouldn't get pregnant. She now has five kids. I never got to meet Patrick Swayze.

There weren't many rules at my dad's. From what I could gather, money equaled fun. Not that we were poor and struggling back home; my mom and Eric made enough money and took great care of us. But whatever my dad had going on certainly afforded him a lot more luxuries than I was used to. You know, things that don't matter but are fantastic to have. My mom was also a neat freak and didn't really understand sleeping in. At Dad's nobody ever woke me up early on a Saturday morning with a vacuum, and the only kind of pancake breakfasts I ever attended with him were at the International House of Pancakes. I actually don't remember ever seeing him do any sort of housework. His place was always really clean so someone must have done it. My mom would scoff at this notion.

"Oh he's big-time now. He probably has a maid. But at least I don't have to be his maid anymore," she'd remind me as she stood on my bed dusting my ceiling fan and explaining to me the dust wouldn't be falling on my head if I'd just get the fuck up. That was usual around 7:45 A.M. She was scheduled to vacuum at eight and everyone knows you always dust before you vacuum.

"Maybe you should get a maid," I told her no less than a million times.

"Never."

My mom now has a housekeeper. In Arkansas you can get one once every couple of weeks for the reasonable price of \$35.99. I'm glad she figured out that she deserves to relax after work. But she still cleans up on the day the woman is supposed to come so that the housekeeper doesn't see her house dirty. I think she has a problem.

Since Farmington was such a small town everybody knew everybody. My mom's brothers and their wives lived within a couple of miles from us. So did my grandparents and their friends. We were a tight-knit group. My entire life there, every birthday was celebrated with a gathering. It still is. I get cakes in my thirties just like I did when I was a kid; the only difference is now they aren't shaped like a bunny rabbit with licorice for the whiskers. For every single member of the family's birthday, we all got together and there was pizza and cake and little to no booze. My mom's side of the family was a lot different than my dad's. When I was visiting my dad, parties were fun. When I was home at my mom's, parties were tame. The loveliness of it all escaped me and I just wanted to know when it would be over so I could go in my room and talk on the phone and listen to Def Leppard. The most exciting part of any gathering was when a fire would erupt and I'd watch every person in the house scatter. I'd then help myself to the remainder of the pizza and ponder who would be there for me if that house went up in flames.

Dad's family was different. The only person I was close to on his side of our family was his mom. She was wonderful. She'd take the Greyhound all the way from California to visit my sister and me in Arkansas. She lived alone and was a big drinker. I think at some point she drank rubbing alcohol, so she might have been more than just a drinker. She used to send me pictures of herself that she took with a Polaroid. She'd use the handle of a flyswatter to push the button on the camera, so every photo she sent had this long white handle stemming from

her arm. It was a reminder to me that she lived alone. Her husband was remarried and she was not, but she was always smiling. Maybe it was the vodka, but all I knew was that she looked happy.

When Dad wasn't married, he usually had a girlfriend, sometimes two. I really didn't want to have to hang out with these women. It seemed like such a waste to buddy up with someone who obviously had no idea what she was up against. The odds of things working out for the two of them were never in her favor. I have to give it to Dad, though—he always tried. You could tell he really loved these people, or at least thought he did. He was probably just in love with the idea of being in love, but at that age I hadn't yet been to therapy, so I couldn't offer him that sort of insight. He's now been happily married for fifteen years to a wonderful woman, by the way. I guess sometimes it just takes a few tries to find your perfect match. And he tried four times.

One time when Jennifer and I went to visit him in California he had a new girlfriend named Candy. She was exactly what you'd expect you'd get from a woman with that name. Blond, big boobs, stupid. We hadn't met her yet, so Dad decided to bring her with him to pick us up at the airport. I was pretty annoyed: I hadn't seen him in a year and now I had to put up with this disaster all the way to his house. She tried to talk to me, so I pretended to fall asleep and left my sister to maintain the conversation. When we got to Dad's house I pretended to wake up and we got our bags and went inside. Dad then went back out to the car with Candy.

"I'm going to take her home. I'll be back in a little bit."

"What? We just got here!" I whined.

"I'll be right back!" With that he and Candy drove off into the night.

I couldn't understand why he didn't just drop her off before we got home. Wouldn't that have made more sense than leaving us there by ourselves? Jennifer explained that he probably wanted to have sex with her and it would be easier at her place.

"Gross! Her boobs are gross. I hate her."

"Me too," Jennifer decided. "By the way, nice fake sleeping in the car. Way to leave me stuck talking to Candy Cane."

"Sorry, I'm just a really good actress."

The rest of the summer we didn't see much of Candy. She went out to dinner with us one night the week that we arrived, and I could see that Dad was already losing interest in her. Maybe her stupidity was only fun for a few days? I hoped that was the case, but I didn't want to bring it up. I figured I'd count her absence as a blessing and leave it at that. It would have been too embarrassing to have a stepmom named Candy.

Regardless of who my dad was dating or married to when I came to visit, I got to do cool shit and meet interesting people. Since he was in sports, I was able to meet a handful of famous athletes, although I didn't know who most of them were. Most of my sports interest was in Friday night football at my school, and my halftime dance with the drill team. Regardless, I'd go home and brag to the guys in my class that I got to meet Jack Youngblood, whoever that was. They were impressed. Mission accomplished.

The only thing I really paid attention to in the professional sports world was baseball. I always liked going to Angels' games with my dad in the summer. That was when they were the California Angels, before they were the Anaheim Angels, and way before they became the

Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. Don't get me started.

We usually had to watch the game from a press suite, which meant tons of free food and sneaking little bottles of booze when nobody was looking. I'd take my Coke that I had spiked with bourbon out to one of the seats and watch the game from there with the rest of the loyal fans. What were these press people doing inside chatting when they could be outside taking in the game and all of the players' nice asses? My teenage hormones really loved baseball.

Those summers I sat in the stands and dreamed of being a baseball wife. Sure, I heard stories about the kind of life that those people lived. Baseball wives put on a smile and clapped in the stands, but inside they were sad. Their husbands were always gone. They got tired of being alone so they'd try to go to all of the games, including away games. Then they'd get tired of being on the road. They'd go back home but then they'd hear heartbreaking rumors about who was having an affair with whom so they'd drink chardonnay and take on lovers to hide the pain. I thought it sounded awesome. Still do. I really need to stop watching Lifetime.

Unfortunately I never met any guys when I was visiting Dad. I had a few girlfriends in California, but most were daughters of people who Dad worked with. This one girl, Stephanie, was really impressive to me. She was a full-on California girl. She grew up there and she had the tan to prove it. I'm sure now she has the sun damage and wrinkles to prove it, but I bet she doesn't care. She also liked to smoke, which piqued my interest. We spent several afternoons together; we usually had her mom or my dad drop us off at the mall. We would walk around for a while, taking the occasional smoke break. She told me stories of going to junior high in California. She said that people had parties at their parents' houses and took a bunch of Dramamine. Apparently the right amount of it made you hallucinate. I told her I had taken "my fair share" of Dramamine and she seemed impressed. I didn't bother to explain that it was never more than two and it was because of the in-flight vomiting.

Stephanie had an older sister, Brie. She was Jennifer's age and they were friends. I don't know what they did during their hang-out time together, but I think it was more impressive than looking for tank tops at Express and smoking. At one point my sister was out with Brie and she met a guy. He was in the army or something. I didn't know exactly what he did, but I just knew he had a short haircut and talked about tough training. Jennifer decided that she was in love with him. She spoke tragically of the upcoming end to the summer and how she would have to go back to Arkansas and leave her true love in California. She told me that "Right Here Waiting" by Richard Marx was their song.

"*Oceans apart, day after day, and I slowly go insane ...*" Jennifer would recite the words of the song to me while she cried about leaving him. I felt bad for her, but I was more interested in what ocean she thought separated California and Arkansas. I guessed that Earth wasn't helping her with geography.

When we returned home after the summer, Jennifer announced to Mom that she was in love, that her new boyfriend was coming to visit for a week, and that he'd be staying with us. His name was Greg and he was going to be Mom's son-in-law when Jennifer turned eighteen, so she might as well welcome him with open arms. My mom stared at her for a long time and then simply said, "Fine."

"Really?" Jennifer asked.

"Really?" I also asked.

“Really,” Mom said. “Oh, just one thing. He’s not staying in the house. He can sleep in the camper.”

The camper was in our driveway. Greg was going to have to fly to Arkansas and camp in our driveway if he wanted to see Jennifer. Sure, we had a decent camper, complete with a TV and a table that converted to a bed, but it certainly wasn’t a place you wanted to make company sleep. It *definitely* wasn’t the place you wanted your future husband to have to sleep the first time he visited you.

Greg sucked it up and came to stay with us. He slept in his designated area outside and didn’t seem to mind too much. He thought it was a pretty nice trailer.

“Do you guys use it often?” he inquired.

“We use it a lot when it’s nice out,” I explained. “During the winter it just sits there, but Mom hides our Christmas presents in it. Let me know if you see a pair of Z. Cavaricis in any of the cabinets. I better get them this year.”

After Greg went back to California, Jennifer stopped talking about him and eventually she never brought him up again. Sometimes when people show you that they really care about you, you don’t care about them anymore. Later on in life, I’d find out that I could relate.

A couple of broken engagements and three or so years after Lori, my dad got married again. Her name was Carol, and she was kind of a bitch.

She worked at a rival newspaper, so she and Dad would drink coffee in the morning and talk about what was wrong with each other’s paper. They had kind of a love-hate relationship, mostly consisting of hate. There was one thing I liked about Carol and that was that she let me drink wine. I think she was just doing what she could to get through our summer visits. It was half-water/half-wine, but it was better than nothing. She always let Jennifer and me have it with dinner, under the expectation that we wouldn’t go home and tell our mom that her twelve- and fifteen-year-old daughters were allowed to drink when we went to California. That wasn’t going to be a problem. We certainly weren’t going to open our mouths and ruin our fun.

I remember once she took me shopping with her so that she could buy an outfit for some sort of opening of some sort of library. She purchased a \$2,000 silk suit and some shoes that ran about \$450. My feelings were mixed with shock and awe. Spending that kind of money on one outfit would have sent my mother to a mental institution. I was sure she’d be in a ton of trouble when she got home, and I was kind of looking forward to watching Dad yell at her, especially since she had denied me a really cute pair of jeans.

When we got back, I noticed she didn’t mention it to him. He just asked if she found what she needed, she said that she had, and that was the end of that. I later let the price of her outfit slip out on purpose, but Dad seemed unfazed. “It’s her money,” he said flatly. He had no idea how much that one statement would impact me forever. It wasn’t “their money,” it was “her money.” She could do whatever she wanted to do because she made her own money. *Good to know.*

I then became even more pissed that she didn’t spring for the sixty-dollar jeans I wanted and decided to expect some pretty good shit for Christmas from her that year.

Halfway through my senior year of high school my dad took my sister and me on a cruise with him and Carol. We were both pretty excited. This was when I thought cruises were cool before I discovered that vacationing with hundreds of people and doing group aerobics on

deck was pretty humiliating.

The cruise was going to Mexico, and up to that point the only part of Mexico we'd seen was Tijuana, which was only good for stocking up on cheap dolls and maracas to show off back home. We managed to have a lot of fun on the ship, the highlight of the cruise being the Rod Stewart impersonator. He ran around in a Speedo bathing suit with spiky blond hair and an amazing tan. My sister and I found him highly entertaining and did our best to hang out with him. I didn't know he was an impersonator until the last night during the talent show, though. Prior to that, I just thought he was Rod Stewart.

There was a nightclub on the ship, and my dad gave them a credit card to keep open for the three-day stint. He told us to "go nuts," but I don't think he knew what we were capable of. At the time Jennifer was twenty, so she could legally drink since we were A) *on water* and B) *headed to Mexico*. I was still not old enough to drink, but my face was ahead of its time (positive then, but now not so much), so nobody asked. We stayed up late every night with Fake Rod Stewart earning prestigious "Night Owl" badges and talking to people about all the athletes we'd rubbed elbows with in our short lives. Jennifer woke up every morning with a hangover; she was drinking specialty cocktails and frozen drinks. I woke up feeling fine; I was drinking bourbon and water. I knew better than to mix. My older sister was such a rookie.

When my father finally got his bar bill for the three days, he looked at us in shock. He went through each tab that was attached to it asking if that was one of our signatures. We confirmed all but one ... one was Fake Rod Stewart's, *but we had told him that his drinks were on you, Dad*. I shut my eyes and waited for him to yell. My dad is a ton of fun, but when he gets mad it isn't pretty. I felt his hand on my shoulder and opened my eyes to see him smiling. "That's my girls," he said, then he signed the tab.

Toward the end of my summer visits with Dad I would start to miss my family and friends. I would usually get the pang when I still had a week or so left to go, making the last several days almost unbearable. I'd spent enough time in the pool, at the beach, at nice restaurants and sporting events; now it was time to go home and tell everybody how much better my summer was than theirs.

We are all made up of two totally different people. Sometimes you live with them both, sometimes you don't. I don't know what it's like to live in an angry household, because my parents did the smart thing (in my opinion) when they knew it wasn't working: They walked away. Some people stay together for "the sake of the kids," but then the kids just get stuck thinking that people who are married are supposed to hate each other. My parents made sure I grew up in a house where people loved each other, even if for a few years it was just my girls. And even if one of them loved many different people.

No matter how we are raised or what values we are taught, we still have both of our parents' DNA. That's not a bad thing ... it makes us who we are. I grew up in a small town. We canned our own green beans and fed apples to our horses on Christmas morning. It was a really nice life. It was a life you had if you raised a family, and you all lived close to each other, and you all remembered each other's birthday. It was completely different than the way it was at Dad's house. In his world people went to the beach and dressed up and had cocktail parties. I wanted to do that. I wanted to spend my own money on clothes that were too expensive and not have anybody yell at me about it.

Back home, watching parents drag kids to a spaghetti supper and knowing it was probably the highlight of their week freaked me out. They seemed happy, so why didn't I want it? On one side of my family volunteered every day, at times putting their lives on the line to help others while I slumped around pissed off that I had to get up early on a Saturday. I felt like such an asshole. If someone wanted to live a perfectly normal Southern family life, who was I to judge? Something about the thought of it all made me cringe. I wasn't judging other people's happiness; I was judging myself for not understanding theirs. I couldn't put my finger on what it was that I didn't like about it. Whatever it was, I knew I had a different idea of fun and from what I understood, you couldn't take a baby to a bar.

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