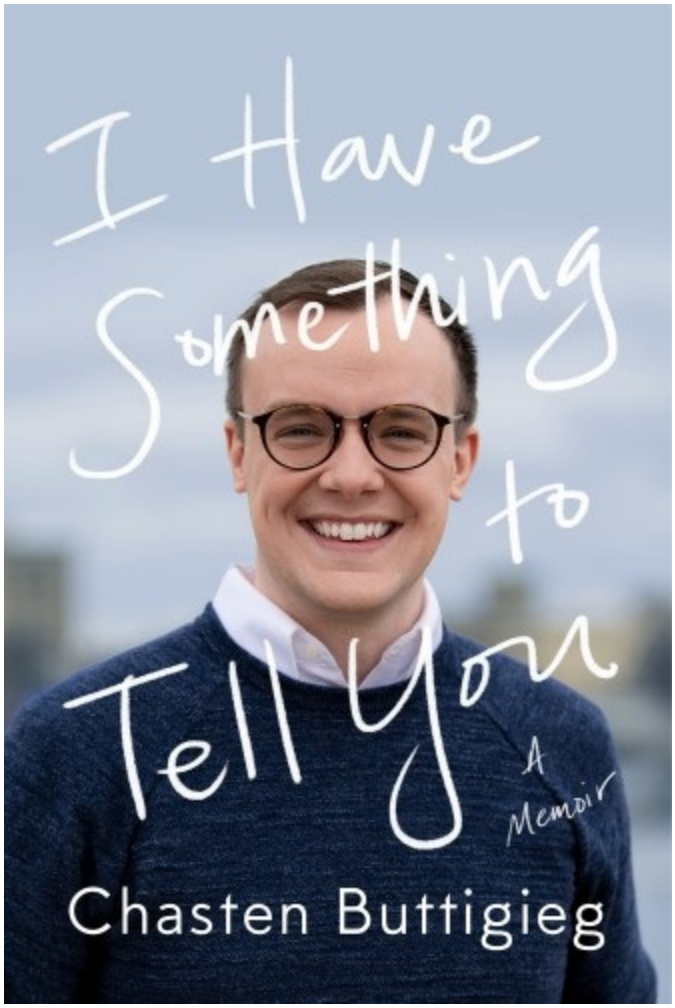

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For Wanda

Introduction: Everything and Nothing

A couple of weeks before my husband officially announced he was running for president of the United States, he and I were eating dinner at an unassuming Thai restaurant in DC, enjoying an increasingly rare evening alone after a grassroots event for his exploratory committee. That night was the first time I'd introduced Peter, who was speaking to a crowd of hundreds of people, and afterward, security ushered us quickly out the door and into a car. On our way out, flashes of sneak-attack selfies and hands grabbing at my shirt were surprising; the energy in the room had been electrifying and wonderfully supportive, but also intense. We hadn't even launched yet, and here we were, filling large rooms to capacity and getting mobbed at the doorway. The fact that we needed crowd control at all still felt surreal.

We were disappointed that we hadn't been allowed to stay and mingle with the audience, but we soon realized we could use this as an opportunity for some much-needed alone time. Once we were in the car, the team finally agreed we could have a "date night," meaning we could grab dinner and go to bed when we wanted. Though the committee had only been up and running for a couple of months at that point, my understanding of luxury had already been

completely transformed: getting Thai food and falling asleep at 10:30 p.m. felt like a weeklong vacation in a Tuscan villa.

Our dinner was mostly uneventful, but on our walk back to the hotel, we

started to attract attention. Maybe it was the spring weather, but folks were excited to see a political couple out and about, and we were happy to oblige requests for photos and signatures. As we walked down 14th Street, I saw that a

small group standing to our left were pretty much staring, and an older woman in

the group looked particularly starstruck. We smiled and continued walking, but

when I peered over my shoulder, I saw that the woman was following us, and I

could see she was already getting emotional. I stopped Peter just as she touched

his shoulder to turn him around, and she immediately began to tear up. “I’m so

sorry to bug you guys,” she said. “It’s just—I’m the mother of two gay children

and what you’re doing for this country and for them… I am just so proud of you

and so happy you’re getting out there.” Her children had caught up with her —

they were a little embarrassed, but excited to meet us, too. “Hi, we’re the gay children,” the daughter joked as an introduction.

We all shared a laugh, hugged, and took a family photo together, and Peter

and I walked away, hand in hand, overcome with joy. People were watching us

and responding to our message! But at the same time, that brief encounter made

it clear we had a huge responsibility. We knew we had to get this moment right.

Until that evening, I'd never considered that I could make someone's mother cry just by being myself. In 2019, almost overnight, I went from being a middle-school teacher from Traverse City, Michigan, to becoming a person strangers

looked to for guidance, reassurance, and the perfect reaction GIF on Twitter. I'd

always understood my work as an educator to be about making a small

difference in the lives of my students—I never thought I'd be making waves on

big issues as one part of the first openly gay couple with a real chance at the White House. The pressure was enormous. I probably wasn't as ready as I could

have been, but that didn't matter—I learned the hard way that a presidential campaign is a matter of building the plane as it's taking off.

How did I get here? First, some background: in 2018, after three years of dating, I married Pete Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana. (Though you'll notice I call him Peter, because that's what he goes by with friends and family.) At the time I had no idea we'd be celebrating our one-year anniversary

on the campaign trail, but just a couple of months after our wedding, Peter and I

discussed him running, and I supported it wholeheartedly. As my partner, he had

helped me feel safe and believe in myself—I thought he could do something

similar for the rest of the country.

I'd never thought about what a spouse does on a political campaign, and

that's by design. Political spouses are supposed to be everything and nothing at

the same time, serving as the perfect supporter for the candidate by working nonstop without ever stealing the spotlight, messing things up, or getting in the

way. "There's only one star," as many political operatives will tell you when you

work as a surrogate, and it's not you. At the same time, the spouse plays a crucial role both in front of the cameras and behind the scenes. You know the candidate the best. You know what picks them up, especially when they're on two hours of sleep and have to go into their sixth interview of the day—you're

on call for when the candidate needs to get into the right headspace. Actually, you're on call for everything. You show up when the candidate can't be there.

You fill in all the gaps. By virtue of your marriage, you're required to be known

to the public as "the candidate's spouse" at the very minimum, and you're

expected to do a lot more than that.

Of course, I always wanted to help in whatever way I could. I love the guy —

that's why I married him. But campaigning is… a lot.

Beyond the relentless schedule and the high stakes, I wasn't prepared for

what having to exist in public on the national stage would do to me, my self-image, and my self-worth. Most people have gotten to know me over the last two

years through the stories that have run about me in the media, or they've made

assumptions about me based on my marriage (or even my social media). While my new platform has afforded me incredible opportunities that I wouldn't trade

for anything, the way my life seemed to be getting away from me was

frustrating. Although I never thought I'd want to write a book, I started to feel like I needed to tell my own story, as cheesy as that might sound. The more time

I spent out on the campaign trail reflecting on my own life and seeing myself in

other people's stories, the more I realized that the experiences and memories I was scared of, embarrassed of, or keeping hidden weren't as weird, mockable, or

inappropriate to discuss in the context of national politics as I'd assumed they were. They were just real, the truth. Even more remarkable, people seemed to appreciate hearing about them.

Because the fact is, my story isn't rare. In fact, it's pretty common. I grew up

in a conservative small town, with loving parents who worked so hard to support

me but didn’t know many gay people before I came out to them, terrified, at age

eighteen. I lived my entire adolescence in shame, feeling like I’d never fit in in

my high school or my community, and even after I came out, I couldn’t shake the feeling that this essential fact about me meant I’d never find love or have a

family. Despite being a goody-two-shoes high school student and working

multiple jobs since I was legally allowed to do so, I struggled to finish college,

and by my midtwenties I was sitting on about $100,000 of student loans and medical debt. I lived paycheck to paycheck for years after college, desperately looking for some sign of a happy, stable future, and I often didn’t know if I was

going to make it.

I certainly never thought I’d find myself living with a politician, but the experience has shown me that this story of mine isn’t apolitical. Politics is in all

our living rooms. It’s around our kitchen tables and in our mailboxes. Whether I

was hearing the stories of young queer people who’d been kicked out of their homes and didn’t know what to do next, or talking to factory workers who were

afraid of what was going to happen to their jobs, or hosting a roundtable with fellow teachers who felt they weren’t getting the support they needed, I was constantly reminded that Americans should be able to see themselves in the

people tasked with representing them at the highest levels of government.

So that's why I'm here now. We're currently living through a rapid shift in

politics. (As this book goes to print, our country is grappling with the COVID-19

pandemic, as well as a long-overdue upheaval in the way we discuss and act on

racial injustice and police brutality.) I think Peter and I are part of a group of young politicians and activists who have a unique opportunity to reimagine the

world that's emerging. I don't want to waste the chance I've been given to do my part just because I came by it swiping through a dating app while I was

wasting time at work. (Yup, that's how I met Pete Buttigieg.) I have by no means figured it all out yet, but I definitely learned a lesson or two on the way,

and you can bet I'm ready to share.

One

1

Not That Kind of Camp

As the husband of a former mayor and presidential candidate, I realize that

I'm the sort of public figure who, in Hollywood, might be described as D-list, if

I made it onto any list at all. The problem is not just my awkward positioning in

the middle of the Venn diagram connecting "figures the kids know about" and

“figures people who watch cable news know about.” The last name *Buttigieg* obviously stands out, but my unusual first name can sometimes throw the whole

name-recognition project off track before you get there. Buttigieg’s husband?

What’s his name? It’s not uncommon for me to have to repeat it over and over

again at the coffee counter until it is ultimately shouted back as “Chastain,”

“Justin,” or “Charles.” I used to take great offense when my name was

mispronounced—I always liked that it was unique, so why didn’t anyone else?

With age, there came the realization that this would be my normal, that baristas

are overworked and underpaid, and that if I wanted to streamline the coffee-ordering process I would have to assume an alternate identity. If it’s prudent, I

tell people my name is *James* and move on with my life.

Unfortunately, when it comes to understanding just how I got this unique

name, the story is dissatisfying and inconclusive; there is an answer, but an incomplete one. My mom used to take on shifts as a nursing assistant in addition

to doing the books for our family’s landscaping business, and she swears that a

woman she worked with at the hospital was putting on a Christmas play that featured a character named King Chasten. As soon as she heard it, she loved it.

Of course, I've done extensive research, and I can't find a King Chasten

anywhere. There *is* an Arthurian ballad that contains a command "… king, chasten thy wife…," but based on the way that text continues, I really don't think my mom's friend would be in a play based on it. Regardless, it's not pronounced like the verb, which means "to have a restraining effect on" and which is the opposite of my personality (I hope). It's pronounced with a short *a*

and a hard *t*: CHAS-ten.

If anything, my name is an expression of my parents' creativity. My parents,

Terry and Sherri Glezman, are loving, dedicated people who live for their friends

and family; they always made sure their children's lives were full of little adventures (and some bigger ones). Their parenting philosophy was neither

hands-off nor helicopter, which allowed me to develop my independence in a

genuine way without feeling totally unmoored. Though we've had our hard

times, certain clichés ring true: they always wanted the best for me, and they

absolutely "made me who I am today." Since understanding that is part of the point of writing a memoir, this is where I have to begin.

My grandfather moved between Traverse City, Michigan, and coastal cities

for years before ultimately planting permanent roots in 1959, when he was

relocated for the National Coast Guard. Since then, the extended family nearby

has grown so large that we can't fit into a single house for our holiday gatherings

—we now squeeze close to forty people at a time into my father's finished barn.

(We'll talk about barns a bit later.) The woods and waters of Northern Michigan

provided a lot of necessary set elements for my "rub some dirt in it, you'll be fine" childhood. Some of the best illustration I can think of happened at Fish Camp. What's Fish Camp, you ask? Well: Fish Camp was *the* annual father-son

tradition in our family. The name refers to what we did (fish) and the vibe (camp, and not in the Susan Sontag sense). My mother's uncle, Uncle Gene, has

a cabin in the middle of nowhere, just outside Baraga, in the Upper Peninsula of

Michigan, and every summer my dad, two older brothers, and I would make the

multipart journey together. The four of us would pile into Dad's truck and make

the seven-hour drive north with a truckload of coolers, gear, and a bag full of beef jerky. Along the way, Dad would stop at the Mackinac Bridge so we could

take in the view and buy a pop from the convenience store. We'd play car games

across the UP, listening to talk radio or the local country music station, which was probably called The Moose, until the only signs of civilization were the occasional pasty stand, bait shop, or gas station (which most likely sold pasties

and bait). Once we made it to Baraga, we'd stop and say hi to Uncle Gene and

"Aunty Mares" (that's Aunt Marilyn in "Yooper" speak). Gene would probably

tell us something like "The skeeters are bitin' real hard—make sure ya lather on

da bug dope." (That's, uh, mosquitos are biting and be sure to wear bug spray…

dontcha know.) A few more miles into the forest and the real adventure began—

not only do you have to drive into camp on a dirt road, you used to have to take

an ATV part of the way, and in the winter, the men who went to the cabin to hunt deer would have to snowmobile into camp. Ultimately, Gene was able to dig a road out to the cabin, which, honestly, is kind of a bummer. The act of parking the truck, throwing on your backpack, and trudging through the rich copper mud was thrilling. There was no electricity or running water. In the daytime, in addition to fishing, Dad would bring rifles for us to practice shooting

clay pigeons or targets; I became a really good marksman, even though I never

lost my unease around guns. Just seeing the guns on the picnic table made me nervous, and although my dad has gifted me a few guns for birthdays over the years, they remain in his safe back home in Michigan. Dad was also very

adamant about gun safety, and took pride in teaching the three of us boys

responsibility in every sense. This became something I could share with voters on the trail who, for better or worse, had a lot to say about guns. I

learned a lot,

and my dad always made sure I wasn't too far outside my comfort zone—but my

unease never went away.

My favorite part of Fish Camp wasn't shooting combustibles; it was the fish.

Evenings were spent cooking what we'd caught that day. We'd pump water from

the well, filet the fish, toss them in some batter, and fry them over the fire in a

skillet. The simplicity was remarkable. The sun would set, we'd build a bonfire,

and Uncle Gene would tell scary stories about man-eating wolves, close

encounters with bears, and the occasional camper-abducting alien. Once the fire

died down, we'd be left with the bright northern stars. We slept in sleeping bags

on bunk beds, with Dad closest to the door, a gun propped up near his bed just in

case a bear or wolf came too close to camp. One part safety, the other, I'm convinced, just to scare the shit out of Chasten. Right when I'd start to doze off,

my dad would say something like "Shh. Did you hear that?" Of course, there was nothing outside, and Dad couldn't keep himself from snickering.

I always prided myself on my performance at Fish Camp—throughout my

childhood and adolescence, I was driven by a desire to be out in front. We were

a competitive family, and sticking my neck out, both to win and to impress my

parents, was always the name of the game. At home, my older brothers were Dad's boys, while one of my favorite pastimes was singing Celine Dion songs to

my mom while she folded laundry. But I was secretly very good at a lot of things

involving the Great Outdoors. I knew it drove my brothers nuts that I excelled at

school and, occasionally, at being an outdoorsman. (To give them credit, while I

preferred to sleep in and watch cartoons, they often found the energy to wake up

at the crack of dawn and hunt and skin a deer.) They were always messing around and getting in trouble, in fairly elaborate ways. There was the time they

almost started a forest fire because one of them had stepped on a bee's ground

nest, gotten stung, and needed to seek revenge on "those fucking bees." They returned to the scene of the crime and proceeded to pour gasoline all over the nest. This came to my attention when Rhyan, the oldest, zoomed into camp on a

four-wheeler and jumped off so fast that the ATV kept rolling a few more yards.

Just as a small plume of smoke became visible on the horizon, Dad came rushing

out of the cabin with my brother, grabbed a jug of water and a shovel, jumped on

another ATV, and zipped off into the woods. It was a small fire, easily

extinguishable, and the forest was saved. Rhyan and Dustin had a good laugh, but Dad was furious. The entire time, I remained in my folding chair reading Harry Potter.

Fishing was where I excelled. I was great at tying hooks—one of my

brothers hated touching worms and putting them on the hook, but I never minded getting my hands dirty, a quality that has helped me excel equally at raising cows and, eventually, working as a barista at Starbucks. As a result, I always caught the biggest fish. Everyone at Fish Camp probably says this, but for me it

was true. I swear. (Upon publication of this book, I'm sure all the reviews will

come with headlines like "PETE BUTTIGIEG'S FATHER-IN-LAW

DISPUTES CLAIMS MADE IN HUSBAND'S EXPLOSIVE NEW MEMOIR:

'Chasten didn't catch the biggest fish.'") One summer my dad lost his favorite

lure after his line snapped while he was reeling in a fish; about an hour later, I

caught a largemouth bass, and when we finally got home and began gutting it for

dinner, there, lodged deep in the fish's throat, was Dad's favorite lure. I was really pleased with what this said about my fishing skills, though of course I never would have said that out loud.

Just kidding. Everyone hears this story… annually.

My dad is a no-bullshit kind of guy, reserved but very funny in his own way.

He had very high, unspoken expectations that he put a lot of stock in, but most

people know him for his generosity and love of surprises. (He once bought my

mom a Persian kitten that we named *Sheetah*, as in "sheet of ice," which was an appropriate description of the weather when we brought her home. Sheetah

seemed to hate all of us, but that was part of her charm.) It's always a pleasure to

hear my dad laugh, because it happens so rarely. It happens especially when he

is playing a practical joke, which, in a very dad-like way, he absolutely loves.

When I was young I thought I was his easiest target, but now I wonder if he played those tricks on me so much because he thought the opposite—because he

saw pranks as tests and learning opportunities, peculiar gifts that I could be trusted to handle without setting anything ablaze.

Some examples: In the summers, Dad would take us out on our small

pontoon boat (which he named "the Pleasure Patrol"), and after I watched *Jaws*

—at way too young an age—he would swim under the boat and pull my legs

from below so that I thought I was being attacked by a shark. At Fish Camp, our

usual fishing hole was a big, muddy, tree-lined riverbank; if you navigated the mud well, you could walk out into the slow river all the way up to your chest.

One year a sturgeon jumped out of the river about ten or twenty yards down from where I was standing; I'd never seen a fish that big before (they can grow

up to eight feet long), and my dad shouted from downstream, "Get out of the water! They'll eat your legs!" You'd think that, as a teenager, I'd have been able

to recognize when he was teasing me, but when it came to monsters in the water,

I never took my chances. I waded as fast as I could out of the river, and my dad

couldn't stop laughing. My scream was most definitely heard from miles away.

Unfortunately, autumn offered little respite. Every year around Halloween, WTCM, the local country radio station in Northern Michigan, would play a

spoken-word Halloween song/story called "The Legend of the Dogman," which

had it that every seven years a creature that was half man, half vicious, man-eating dog (but not a werewolf?) roamed Northern Michigan terrorizing farm

animals and tearing apart its victims. (Every year, the song would say, "The seventh year is here.") Every time the song came on, even though he knew I hated it, my dad would crank it up, rolling down the windows and howling as I

pleaded with him to cut it out. When we went camping, he'd ask me as we walked through the woods: "Chasten, do you think the Dogman is out?" or

whisper, “The seventh year is here,” and I’d grip my flashlight tighter as Dad cackled. This particular torment culminated when he put a ladder up to my

bedroom window and scratched at the screen, so that when I woke up I saw the

Dogman glaring at me from outside. My bedroom was right next to the back

porch, so by the time I’d jumped out of bed and sprinted to the living room, the

Dogman had also shifted positions and was visible outside the porch door. That

the Dogman was wearing my dad’s clothes didn’t register at the time. He very well may have eaten my dad already, then put on his clothes. That’s a thing that

absolutely could’ve happened. Hearing her son screaming bloody murder, my mom came rushing in, at which point my dad opened the door and took off his

wolf mask. Mom was livid, but Dad, of course, could barely contain himself. He

still calls me, every Halloween, to play the song through the phone. I still hate

the Dogman, and I’m still wary around open water.

The most instructive of Dad’s pranks took place at Fish Camp when I was

about thirteen. From the cabin, we’d take our four-wheelers through the woods,

following two-tracks or trails my uncle had cleared or mapped for us, until we emerged at the river. From there, we’d walk along the steep, coppery

riverbank

until we found a spot that spoke to us, miles from another human being. The silence was peaceful, but it was also a reminder of how remote we truly were.

One day, my brothers wanted to go to a different fishing hole than the one we were at, so my dad agreed to find a new spot with them. Dad made sure I was

fine to stay where I was alone and said he'd come back to pick me up in a little

bit. Then they all rode off on their four-wheelers and I settled in. The sun was shining, the birds were chirping, and I was more than happy to be alone. As I believe I mentioned, I was a skilled fisherman—I didn't need a chaperone.

Some time passed, longer than necessary to drop my brothers off and come

back, but it was still daylight, so I didn't worry too much. I just kept fishing. But

then the sun began to set, and I started getting worried. I pride myself on having

inherited my father's pinpoint-accurate sense of direction, but I wasn't sure

walking miles alone through the woods in the dark was the wisest choice. (Also, I was thirteen.)

Dad had never told us what to do if we found ourselves alone in the middle

of the forest at night. What I did know was that I had waterproof matches in my

tackle box, and how to start a fire, so that's what I did. I continued fishing to keep busy, but as the sun started to disappear behind the tree line, and the

sky was getting darker and darker, the fear really started to set in. A few hours had

passed. Eventually, I packed up my tackle box and turned my back to the river,

figuring the monsters would come from the woods. Across the river was a steep

bank, and the woods ascended above me by about a hundred feet. Surely the wolves were perched there, watching.

Finally, I heard the four-wheeler in the distance. The moment Dad came into

the clearing I was running to him asking why he had left me for so long. I must

have sounded like a parent myself: How could he do such a thing? Leaving his

own child to fend for himself in the middle of the woods at night? There were wolves out here! I could have been eaten! BY THE DOGMAN! (Maybe this one

was a little less than parental.) It turned out that Dad had been on the other side

of the river the entire time, watching to see what I'd do. He was so trusting, and

he truly believed in pushing us out of the nest to see if we could fly. Like it or

not, I'd flown.

Mom still gives Dad a lot of grief for the cruel tricks he played on me when I

was younger, but when I tell that story she seems more proud than protective. I

think she knew he had done right by her and me, making sure I could take care

of myself. I was going to be all right. I always felt closer to him on those trips—

he gave me more than enough room to explore and be myself, without ever

actually causing me harm.

If my dad had taken it upon himself to teach us how to trust our instincts and

fend for ourselves (safely and responsibly!), my mom, Sherri, taught us the value

of routine and reward. She is joyfully loud—in the best way—and wonderfully

eccentric. Her smile is almost always on, even when, as you'll learn, she's dealing with immense pain. She has jet-black hair that's often expertly held in place with a whole lot of hair spray. (While waiting on Mom to get ready to leave, you knew it was almost time to go when you heard the sound of aerosol.)

She wears a necklace and bracelet with individual charms that correspond to each of her children and grandchildren. Often when she yelled our names, you'd

think there was a serious emergency: a heavy object about to fall and crush us, a

pet-related tragedy. Usually she just wanted help carrying groceries into the house. She's never afraid to dance or sing in front of strangers, even if she

doesn’t know the words, and she loves to host family and friends, which means she always wants the house in impeccable shape. In a very Midwestern mom

way, she decorated our kitchen with those wall decals that stated things like “It

is around this table we understand best the warmth of being together,” and there

is always a Yankee Candle burning in the house. When we were kids, and my brothers were a bit older and often busy with extracurricular activities, many of

the household chores fell to me. Every day, when I came home from school, I would do the dishes, sweep, vacuum, and tidy my room—it all had to be finished

before I could do my homework. (I wonder if this wasn’t a sneaky strategy to get

me to look forward to my homework by comparison.) Now, when Peter and I

come home to visit for the holidays, the house still looks like a professional cleaning service came through, and even when I’ve shown up as a surprise, the

house has still been remarkably clean. We never had an allowance when we

were younger, but we could earn our keep. “Why would I buy a dishwasher

when I gave birth to three?” Mom always joked. Occasionally, she would pay me to do extra chores on top of my usual responsibilities—deep-cleaning the bathroom, shampooing the carpets, vacuuming the staircase, cleaning the

garages, or washing the windows would earn me a few extra bucks, which I

usually saved in a small wooden box under my bed with my arcade tokens and

other beloved trinkets. I was always happy to vacuum, but the dusting was

stressful, because it was always subject to the white-cloth test. Sherri ran a tight

ship.

Mom was great at stretching our dollar and making sure we always had

plenty of food on the table, and it always felt special, even if a lot of it was canned or from a box. At home, pigs-in-a-blanket (hot dogs wrapped in Pillsbury

crescent rolls) were staples, as were canned tomato soup and canned peaches and

pears. (After Peter and I started dating, I learned that pigs-in-a-blanket were a treat reserved for Christmas mornings in his family. For us, they were a "Mom

just got home from work and is tired" staple.) We had mashed potatoes or mac

and cheese with most dinners. In the years after I finished college, when I had to

pay for something I didn't quite have the money for, I sometimes thought about

my mom, in a bathrobe, her hair still wet from the shower, getting her purse and

writing us a check for school lunches in the mornings, saying that it might not be

enough. It always just went over my head when she did that; it never occurred to

me that it not being enough could have some kind of consequence for me, and

that's why she was mentioning it. Today I realize how hard it must have been to

have to express that kind of worry to your kids—if it wasn't enough, she didn't

want us to be caught off guard—but she never stressed us out about it.

And it's not like we didn't have nights out on the town. For special

occasions, my family loved celebrating at Outback Steakhouse; I'm still a sucker for a Bloomin' Onion. Other times it just seemed like Mom and Dad had had about enough of us, and when that happened they'd take us up to the Burger King so we could eat a Kids Meal and play on the indoor playground—always

an adventure. In retrospect, we seemed to eat a lot of fast food, but Mom always

made it seem like a special treat, just as her cooking was. I still pine for her signature dishes when I'm away from home: she made terrific spaghetti, beef stroganoff, meatloaf, and hearty winter stews. On Christmas mornings, she'd

serve her famous homemade cinnamon rolls, a tradition that continues to this day. When I was very young, in the fall and winter, Dad typically brought home

meat from the buffalo packing slaughterhouse where he sometimes picked up

extra hours. It was always a really special night when he brought home ribs; even though he'd work late on these nights, we'd always stay up waiting for

him

to get home and grill immediately. In the summer we would line up along the side of the road to buy sweet corn from a well-known local farmer. You had to

watch the news to see when he was available.

My parents still live in the same house I grew up in, a cozy three-bedroom

split-level in a subdivision just outside Traverse City. They bought it when my

mom was nineteen and my dad was twenty, right after they got married. I think

my father prides himself on having the nicest lawn in the subdivision—as a landscaper he has meticulously trimmed, pruned, mowed, and planted everything

to his liking. Not a blade of grass untouched, no tree ignored, every hanging basket expertly placed. My two older brothers shared a room until my dad was

able to build a separate bedroom in the basement for my oldest brother. I always

had the same bedroom, across the hall from my middle brother, facing the

backyard and our aboveground swimming pool, which Dad also took great

pleasure in cleaning and maintaining. In the winter, we would fill up milk jugs

and throw them out into the pool as the water slowly turned greener, to prevent

the Northern Michigan ice from ripping the lining. From the back porch the deck

separated the area into two small backyards. One yard was for the dogs, the first

of which (in my time) was a Pekingese named Brittany. Brittany was succeeded

by a black lab named Brisco, whom Dad trained extensively. Open the front

door, and Brisco would run outside, grab the newspaper from the mailbox, and

bring it back into the house. He followed Dad everywhere.

The other yard was for us kids to play in, and Dad has since turned it into a

large garden, where he grows his own vegetables, which find their way every year into Mom's signature salsa. This is in keeping with his encroachment

approach to the house in general. We have two garages. Though one is called

"Mom's garage," it's also full of Dad's junk, with just enough space for her car.

The other garage, "Dad's garage," is more like a workshop, where Dad now practices making his own maple syrup, smoking his own beef jerky and

sausages, and making garland with fresh greens from the Upper Peninsula as he

watches TV and periodically checks on the smoke shack.

My parents run their own small landscaping business, and from the time I

was about ten or so I was helping out in some capacity. Every night, Dad would

bring home the hydroseeder, a giant, tank-like trailer that was filled with water

and seed mix to spray on new lawns throughout the day. (Well, it *seemed* giant

to me when I was a fifth grader.) My job most evenings was to go out to the driveway when Dad got home and spray down the hydroseeder with the garden

hose as Dad asked me about my day at school. I was happy to help Dad, and even from a young age I saw the exhaustion in his face when he pulled into the

driveway. My dad has broken his back multiple times over the years, but the moment he could feasibly lift something, he was back to work. He continues to

work long hours, in the sun, on his knees, straining his back, and refusing to quit.

Working for my parents' landscaping business also included stuffing,

licking, sealing, and stamping what seemed like endless envelopes containing

invoices with Mom in her office, which over time migrated from the kitchen table to the small office my dad fixed up for her in our basement, to some property my family secured about five miles down the road at the height of the

business. In the winters, my parents also operated a Christmas tree lot, where they would sell Christmas trees and handmade wreaths. The lot was located next

to a local bison farm, so families could make a big day of it: they'd come see the

Glezmans, buy a Christmas tree, pick out a wreath my mother had made, and feed the bison some hay through the fence. I was still quite young when Dad had

the lot, but I remember visiting him there daily. Mom would bring a Crock-Pot

of sloppy joes, and we'd sit in the camper and wait until a family came. Dad would help the family pick out their tree, my brothers would help move it and tie

it onto their car, and Mom and I would ring them up out of the little white shack

we'd decorated with Christmas lights, where we also sold our homemade hot

cocoa. I was relegated to handing out candy canes, but it was still so fun.

Because of the landscaping business, the Christmas tree lot, and the simple fact that my family had lived in the area for a long time, we always ran into people my parents knew, especially my dad. It was a running joke that we could

never get anywhere on time because of this. If we missed the bus to school and

Mom couldn't drive us, the task fell to Dad, which meant we would be late. He

absolutely *had* to stop at the gas station on the way to get his donut and two cups of coffee, and he inevitably ran into someone, which meant we'd be caught up in

conversation for at least fifteen minutes. We always gave him a lot of grief

because he made us late for school, but everyone knew Dad and had a story to tell about him—how for a family that needed wheelchair access to their house he

had helped build a deck and only charged for the materials. How he'd saved the

day by rushing over to someone's mother's house to fix a leaking toilet in the middle of his lunch break. Dad will still drop everything for anyone.

2

"Did You Walk Your Steer Today?"

All this wholesome childhood Americana, and we haven't even gotten to the

cows. When I was in sixth or seventh grade, my brothers and I started raising animals as part of 4-H with one of our neighbors. When we decided to get into

4-H, which was a pretty big scene where I grew up, my family built a small barn

out on our property together. The "pole barn" is a Midwestern institution that is,

like so many Midwestern institutions, pretty much what it sounds like: a barn constructed out of poles. However, the phrase "run down to the pole barn," like

so many Midwestern phrases, was not meant to be taken literally. It meant we were going down the road to the property, even though the barn that we kept our

animals in was not, get this, a pole barn.

I started out raising dairy feeders and worked my way up to showing steers.

My brothers started with a steer, but I was a tad too small to handle such a large

animal. Steers are yearlong projects, and they're regarded as the big-shot project

in the 4-H community. (Except for horses. Don't get me started on the horse people.) You'd buy the calf wild off a farm in August or September when they

were very young, and you'd have it for about a year before you went to the county fair. When you got a calf, it was only about two hundred pounds, and it

could jump and buck; by the time the fair rolled around, it was between a thousand and thirteen hundred pounds, and completely unmanageable if you

hadn't started out strong—you have to start breaking them in and helping them

trust you right away. It never failed that multiple kids would bring their steer to

the fair only to be dragged around in the dirt by a wild animal they had never tamed. Whenever I got mine, we'd halter it first thing so I could begin taking it

on walks. At the beginning of the project, this involves getting dragged around a

lot, but if you gain their trust, they'll follow you anywhere.

Every morning before school I had to head down to the barn and feed the

cows. After school or on the way home from extracurricular activities, I'd stop at

the barn to feed them again. Then, every weekend, we'd have to take our steers