

Welcome to the Campground
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(An Excerpt from a Work in Progress)

When my parents told me, at the age of five, that they had bought a trailer, I knew already that it was trashy. If watching daytime television with my mother had taught me anything, it was that people who lived in trailers were called "hillbillies" and they were built solely for our entertainment. Many of them would go on "The Maury Show" to reveal that their child was really fathered by one of their sons-in-law, but they weren't sure which. Or maybe a sixteen-year-old would fight on stage with her mother about how she wants to get married and have a child with a thirty-year-old pre-op transsexual. I feared that the acquisition of this trailer would lead me to lose all of my teeth, except for one of the front ones, and have me hoping for the rest of my life to hear Maury Povich say, "You are not the father." I did, however, look forward to inevitably learning how to play a washboard or a large jug with 'xxx' scrawled into the front.

In our jalopy of a white Lincoln Continental, we pulled up onto what used to be a shuffle board court when "Doherty's Mountain View Campground" was "Peter Pan Cottage Resort." I climbed out and swallowed mouthfuls of the fresh mountain air, breathing heavily to recover from having vomited three times thanks to the lack of air conditioning. Since the AC was broken in the Lincoln, my parents believed that leaving the windows open on the Cross Bronx Expressway would help ease my car sickness. What it did instead was fill the car with smog from the stampede of vacationing sedans and Mack trucks driven by what I assumed to be overweight men on caffeine highs.

"Here it is," Mom announced with the voice she reserved for talking to infants and dogs.

I looked at the dirty tan mobile home sitting next to a slanted red deck, flecks of paint peeling like my sunburned skin would the next day. For a quick second I felt bad for the trailer. Its purpose in life was to be hitched to the back of a truck and pulled along the US for fun family adventures, stopping to be slept in, while "the great American family" visited Mount Rushmore, the Grand Canyon and national parks. The trailer was stripped of its identity and thrown atop some cinderblocks.

Mom and Dad hurried us inside to give us "the grand tour." "The grand tour" was completed by standing on one toe and doing a ballerina twirl. Dad did not approve. In my quick spin I absorbed two things: the repetitious use of red/orange/tan/brown tweed fabric (it was on the sofa, the dining booth, the window treatments and the cabinets) and the fact that it smelled like a box of old vinyl records with a hint of pine from the tree growing behind the lot.

It struck me as odd that remotely everything in the trailer could be used as a bed.

“The couch pulls out into a bed,” Dad said. “And up here,” he pulled the front panel of the cabinet above the couch down on its hinge, “If you don’t need it for storage, it can be used as a bed.”

“And look at the table,” Mom said. “It’s a booth, just like at a restaurant.” She wanted so desperately to believe that this was a great decision. “And it pulls out into a bed,” she added.

It became so clear to me why these “hillbillies” were notorious for having children. They had mastered spacing issues. Why store your linens when you can store another half-dozen kids instead?

I imagine the workers developing the designs behind the trailers:

“Yes, I love the idea of making a wall console to hold a television, but hear me out. What if we put it on hinges and make it a murphy bed?”

Subsequently the crowd goes wild and thousands more children are conceived in the lower income bracket.

I was trying to think of ways to make this sound cool when I returned to my second grade class after the summer. There was no doubt I’d have to hear the other kids talk about traveling to exotic locations like Hawaii, Jamaica and Montreal. Why did my parents insist on vacationing to somewhere that mimicked life below our economic standards? Isn’t that counter productive? Isn’t the point of vacationing to make complete strangers think you have much more money than you do, because instead of eating for a few months you save so you can buy \$50 trinkets that you could get at home for \$5? Aren’t you supposed to say things like “What’s the point of life if you you’re not living? Am I right?” and laugh a laugh that would never come from your Long Island, middle class mouth, but rather a British thespian?

My parents had it all wrong. They just didn’t know it.