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Pee Blizzard

I've had better car rides.

Driving up to Duluth wasn't a great car ride, but it was fine, you know? It was long, and my Opa never needs to pee, apparently, so we never stopped for the gas station. But we made it up there in time for the blizzard to hit Lake Superior. Watching the iron gray waves—nearly as tall as my dad—splash right up towards the window of the lodge was beautiful, terrifying, majestic; all those other words people use to describe large bodies of water when they've got thalassophobia.

Anyway. We left Duluth after looking at the Christmas light show. If you've never been, don't go. It's cool if you're in the area, but I can't imagine driving six hours to see it for any reason other than family. Real radioheads might want to visit the Electric Fetus, though. Again, only if you're in the area. My dad and sister went—apparently it's kind of a middling record store, mostly known for the name.

So, Electric Fetus records in tow, we were heading back down to St. Joe to spend Christmas at my Opa's. On the way there we had to visit various other members of the Hanson/Lainen clan scattered around Minnesota. The Hanson clan is small, so we only went to one town—McGregor.

No, it wasn't named for Ewan McGregor. If it was, it would be raised from negative twenty percent cool to negative ten percent. As it is, McGregor has a population of 391 that is shrinking every day. At the time of this story, my Auntie Jo and Uncle Bill were still alive, so the population was 393.

We went to McGregor to visit Auntie Jo and Uncle Bill. Two hardcore Depression-era Minnesotans. Uncle Bill was from the north, and his family was Finnish-American and I think they worked in the mining industry. Iron ore. Riveting stuff, I know. Auntie Jo was from Pine City—practically a metropolis by 1950's Central Minnesotan standards—and she was my late Oma's sister.

Alright. Let's recap. We were driving down from Duluth to visit two family members in their nineties who talked about nothing but their aches, pains, and how the price of bread has gone up to a nickel—as Uncle Bill would have put it. We did eventually make it to McGregor, but it took much, much longer than we thought it would.

That was because of the blizzard.

The blizzard had been really beautiful when I was nice and warm inside a lodge. When I was in a car with my entire family, it became much less beautiful.

Some important background. My mom is from Kentucky and was raised in Florida. She has spent nearly her entire life living in the South (or other warm places). So, when the blizzard came and we were still trundling along a single-lane road in the middle of bumfuck Minnesota, she wanted us to turn around and go back to Duluth.

If we did that it would mean driving into the storm following us and wasting three hours of gas, as we'd just driven three hours down from Duluth. We were halfway to St. Joe—McGregor was smack in the middle of Duluth and St. Joe. Auntie Jo and Uncle Bill's house was somewhere on the horizon, or so Opa assured us. To make matters worse, it was beginning to hit nighttime, and our only source of light was the car's headlights.

My mom was yelling to turn back. My Opa was stubbornly pushing ahead (he doesn't let other people drive). My dad was having to mediate between the two, and me and my sisters were

pressed into the backseat praying this didn't turn out like the other blizzard.

The other blizzard was when we were 7 or 8 years old. A freak blizzard hit western North Carolina, and we ended up stranded on the highway with no water or food—our only sustenance was a half-eaten little line of Belgian chocolate shaped like Santa's reindeer my mom had gotten as a work gift. Dad eventually got out of the car, trudged up to a Walmart we were fortunately next to, and bought a shovel. Some people helped him dig our car out of the snow, and we rolled into a motel parking lot and took their last room. The power was out and all we had to light the room was McDonald's Avatar figurines the receptionist gave us. The movie had just come out. I can't believe the sequel was only released a few months ago. I'm twenty years old writing this.

So, we did not want this blizzard to turn into that blizzard, particularly because we were in the middle of a forest Stephen King would be scared of in a town with a population of 393 and there was no Walmart for at least three hours in any direction. The tension in the car was at an all-time high.

Then I had to pee.

I had to pee really, really badly. I spoke up and told everyone I had to pee, it just couldn't wait until we got to Auntie Jo and Uncle Bill's, I'd never needed to pee this bad in my life. That was probably true. I can still remember how excruciating it was. Every single bump in the road sent awful shocks straight to my bladder. I'd never be able to live down the embarrassment of peeing my pants at the ripe old age of 16.

Understandably, this caused a significant amount of distress in the adults, who were already experiencing significant amounts of distress. I'd known this would happen, which was why I had waited so long to tell them, but the fact was that there was nowhere besides God's natural toilet to pee in the entire stretch between Duluth and McGregor. You'd think a state in the

capitalist United States of America would have at least one chain store with a public bathroom every 70 miles, but no dice. I'd have to pee in the woods.

My mom convinced Opa to pull over. I'm still not sure how; I think she was the most sympathetic to my plight. She said something about men not understanding women's pain. She was also the one who got out of the car into the blizzard with me to scout out a place to pee.

I was crying at this point, the wind freezing the tears on my cheeks. It was awful. I'd never been so embarrassed peeing in nature. And I hadn't even gotten to the pee part yet! I settled next to a drift that I hoped would hide my modesty, fat flakes of snow blinding me as the sun settled even lower and the trees loomed behind me. The trees were practically begging me to go pee in the forest so I could have even more privacy, but I knew that if I did that, the trees would swallow me whole. I'd scouted out my little snowdrift, Mom was standing an appropriate length away, and I dropped my pants and exposed my poor little buttcheeks to Minnesota's winter winds.

Then I couldn't pee.

I just couldn't. I had to pee so, so much, but the embarrassment combined with the knowledge that we were close to Auntie Jo and Uncle Bill's house froze my bladder up and I just couldn't pee. I hiked up my pants, business incomplete. I sobbed to my mom that I couldn't pee, she pleaded with me to just please pee, honey, no-one is watching and you'll feel better, but no, I couldn't pee, and I took a Walk of Shame back to the car in the horrible cold. Predictably, everyone in the car asked me if I felt better. I had to disappoint them, and the tension grew even worse because we'd just wasted 10 minutes idling in a blizzard for no reason.

But all's well that ends well. I doubt I would be here typing this story if we'd gotten stuck in that blizzard—it was brutal. Just as it started to really howl, we pulled into Auntie Jo and

Uncle Bill's lot and were met with their Depression-era food and Depression-era conversation.

I'd never been so happy to hang around the elder members of the Hanson/Lainen family.

And their padded old-person toilet seat had never felt so good.