

REMINDING ME OF MO

A MEMOIR

GABRIEL
PATTERSON

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PUBLISHING

REMINDING ME OF MO

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The names and identifying characteristics of certain individuals have been changed to protect their privacy.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book was made to honor the life of my friend, Geranimo Maestas. It is neither intended to propagate violence, nor to revise the past. It is not meant to guilt any individual or entity. It is a living document, testament, and sacrament. It is both my recollection of the past and interpretation of the facts, and is not meant to be unequivocal or devout, although by its very nature, it is most certainly unequivocal and devout. Throughout the book, Hip Hop is spelled with capital letters because it is the name of our culture. “Hip” means to know. “Hop” means to move.¹ Thus, we know *why* we move. Such is the case of the *No 'Mo Violence Movement*. Names have been changed to protect identities.

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1. This definition was created by Apostle, aka Jeff Campbell, Denver Hip Hop Activist, Artist, & Pioneer. It was later adopted by KRS-ONE & The Temple of Hip Hop.

THE 826 EXPERIMENT



826 WAS A RAUCOUS RIDE in years past and this year will be no different. Our new bus driver, Shirley, isn't intimidated by a bunch of Mexicans but quickly earns our respect. We appreciate that she keeps a silver boombox in tow, meticulously wedged between dash and window. The airwaves of KS104 keep our attention and Shirley makes no secret of her crush on Bobby Brown, who controls the airwaves of contemporary radio in 1989. Shirley pulls to the curb and cranks the door handle.

Mo and Pablo wait at the front of the line to claim the coveted seats at the back of the bus. Everyone else is scattered about, so I inch closer. Mo has a cool about him, wearing black stonewashed jeans with a pristine pair of Jordans. Pablo is wearing a long-sleeved shirt with shorts, an odd combination, but nobody says anything to him about it. Mo twirls a Chicago Bulls pencil in hand and notices me focused on the logo.

"You don't like the Nuggets?"

"Of course I do, but Jordan is the best player in the league."
Mo responds.

"Not Larry Bird?"

“Larry Bird!” Mo chimes. But his awareness stops himself before expounding any further. He laughs in a high register then turns to Pablo who shakes his head and smiles, dismissing me without even having to speak on it.

“I like the Nuggets but they can’t beat Showtime. Even at fifty-two eighty, we’re still playing four games at the Forum and Showtime always shows up at the Forum.” He holds out his fist and says, “I’m Geranimo.”

“What’s up, I’m Gabriel,” trying to sound cool as we bump fists.

“This is Pablo.” Mo says, introducing me to the behemoth on his side. Pablo then gives me a dap that reverberates my body and that is that. Mo never says I can hang with them but mentions their plan to mash to the back of the bus and I tell myself that no matter what, I will follow.

As Shirley turns onto 38th I expound to Mo and Pablo about the injustice done to me by my dad. “His job gave him tickets to the Nuggets and Lakers at McNichols but instead of taking me he took my uncle. Nope, never forgave him. Still don’t. My one time to see Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson—he hit the game winner no doubt!”

“Well it’s not like you missed Jordan or somethin’.”

“Will you quit with Jordan already? He can’t even get past the Pistons.”

“That’s alright, he’s on *George Michael’s Sports Machine* every night. Hey, you wanna play 21 after school with me and Pablo?”

“Yeah, what rules do you do?”

“Make it/take it. Two-hand tips for minus two, one-hand zero. One-point shots from the top until a miss. No takin’ it back after a miss.”

“You don’t take it back after a miss?”

“Nah,” Mo said, lettin’ me know it wasn’t up for discussion. His court, his rules.

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But we move when the bus moves. Shirley's wide mirror is perfectly positioned to catch us in the act, for moving while the bus is in motion is the most egregious violation in her view. Yet Mo waits until Shirley executes a long buttonhook turn then glides seamlessly into a girl's seat, convincing her of her own adolescent beauty, risking a referral just to dote on her for a while. Of course, we all have bus reputations to uphold. Pablo, who has the upper body of an Olympic weightlifter, is the muscle. All he has to do is merely sit by a kid who's talkin' stuff, sixty seconds later the kid is whimpering from Pablo's physical prowess.

Inside this steel tube we feel invincible. 826 is our Japanese slow-bullet train. Its windows reflecting pictographs, namely a mural of Aztlan, when we hook a left from 42nd Avenue onto Tejon Street. Another right onto 38th Ave, passing the brown brick fire station then a left on Federal. We pass Botanica Yemaya, Woodbury Library, and North High School. On further down Federal Blvd during the entire morning show and all the music, including the "Were you in a recent accident commercials." Now passing Barnum Park and Columbine Steak House. Further down as adolescent boys rubberneck the entrance to Dandy Dan's while exceedingly more mature girls roll their eyes. We pass Chinatown and nope, still not there yet. We begin trading Hoops cards to pass the time. Conversations include the ins and outs of the greatest game ever invented. Green seats become tapestries we populate with jumbo letter font. Nicknames are etched in pencil lead. Bold letters appear from permanent markers written by dudes who crave initiation into a gang.

North Denver to Littleton is like taking us to Oz. The treacherous journey is longer than the 30 and 31 routes of RTD combined. We still do the knowledge. And recess. And the rest of it. We jump off the bus jetlagged, but the bumper-to-bumper traffic won't grind us to a halt. We ask our parents if we can go to

school in our own neighborhood, but they tell us to just deal with it. Nobody tells us it's enforced by the state, a result of *Keyes v. Denver School District 1*, and that some in Denver were so opposed to busing, they exploded buses at the bus depot. That was twenty years ago, and it still impacts all of Denver's neighborhoods. Our side of town is brown, so this forced merging of neighborhoods means anything can happen. Yet riding across town our pride is strong, hopefully we aren't greeted with a bomb.

The best part of 826 is this newfound friendship. Mo and Pablo two titans of 826, and me, hoping to infuse some sophistication to their coolness. We spill onto school grounds with Pro-Keds and British Knights. Mo is last off the bus, dismissing the final two stairs and jump-stopping his introduction into a new world. Walking toward the entrance I ask Mo and Pablo about their homeroom.

"You guys in Ms. Baumbach's class?"

"Damn, me and Pablo both got Vigil, we'll catch up at lunch though. You on free-lunch?"

I had forgotten the Free-Lunch Program certified credibility but pivoted quick, "Oh, well, you know bro, I brought my lunch today," diverting the fact that I must buy my lunch. My coolness waning fast but instead of ousting me, Mo roasted me:

"Hey, *this* crazy fool brought his own lunch to school!" Which resulted in another disapproval from Pablo, who shook his head and through his clenched teeth, let out a "Sssss."

The lawn edges at Kaiser are tight. Perfectly rounded trees with Crayola green grass suspended in white concrete trapezoids. Behind the school is no uneven gravel and broken glass shards like at the bus stop. Their field has a gazebo at the hilltop, highlighting rows of posh mini mansions with erect mailboxes. We enter this stargate known as 826 and emerge on the other side. Most feel we're not supposed to see it, that it's too foreign, and that *we* are too foreign. Nevertheless, the ace up the sleeve

belongs to us, for the keeper of this futuristic landscape—Humberto—rides with us on 826 to maintain its allure.

We step in feeling free. Aqua Netted up. Eons away from our parents. (Do they know where they're taking us?) At lunchtime, neither group has the courage to befriend each other nor extend a hand, for even if we do intermingle, half of us will go home on 826 so it doesn't matter.

Three o'clock approaches and I wonder if the guys will remember me. Will they do a 180? Will Pablo finally decide to speak to me? Hell, they don't even know if I can play yet, but to my surprise, when I climb the three steps onto the bus they're already at the back. Mo waves for me to come on and Pablo—like some type of bouncer—stands in the aisle guarding the two by one seats and moves aside as I roll through. Now we're a trio.

"How was it?" Mo asks.

"What? School? Yeah, it was cool."

"Good, cause ya' mind has to be right for this game were 'bout to run."

That comment has Pablo smiling and the game is afoot.

Shirley lets us get loud. The radio plays jams and it's not long before homework flies out the window. After another momentous trek she drops us off and I follow the guys to just before Pecos Street, where we cut down an alley. Mo grabs his basketball. Next, we throw our school folders on the concrete and it's on. Squeaks only happen in gyms. Out here it's stomps, footsteps and jumpstops. The game is fastpaced and rough. I can't break through Pablo's smothering defense and when I do, Mo scrapes my shot with not much effort, deflecting it as it falls short of the rim.

Mo's eyes are intense, he's both athletic and intelligent on the court. Pablo resembles the Tasmanian Devil. No doubt they are warriors who don't give an inch and stakes are high, reputations are on the line that could last a lifetime. After the first game I'm bent over heaving, hands over my knees, wondering if they'll

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reject me, finishing with a point total of negative 8. Was my basketball IQ high enough for Mo? Was I physical enough for Pablo? I look up and see Mo walking toward me, sweat beads trickling down both sides of his face. He taps me twice on the back and with a steady breath says, “C’mon, brother, let’s run it back.”

ALLINIT

JACKIN' IS AT AN ALL-TIME high. If that fool Tom Brokaw wants to make a change in something that has to do with us, start there. Leave our emcees alone. We don't call anyone "bully." There's just jackers and full-time jack moves. Recreation centers are safe though, and for Mo, this specifically means St. Charles Recreation Center. He always talks about it, describing the ballers at St. Charles and how they come from around the city to sharpen skills. But Mo's done reminiscing this morning. He suggests we go down there. I'm fighting the idea.

"But bro, why we gotta ride across the whole city to play ball? We can do that right here, or we can hit Smedley . . . or Aztlan."

"C'mon, man, nobody's gonna mess with us. It'll be fun. This is loong overdue."

"Where we gonna park our bikes?"

"Who cares?!"

"But we don't have no locks."

"St. Charles is cool, man. We don't need no locks. Truss me. I wanna introduce you to everybody."

I appreciate Mo's confidence but sometimes broad daylight ain't even a safe bet, especially if you want to keep your bike.

They might jack you just for the sake of jackin' you. But Mo's belief that nothing was gonna happen meant nothing was gonna happen. So when I swiped my dad's cycling cap, Mo let me rock it without judgement. So off we went, two homies on two bikes. It would've definitely helped us by having Pablo come but he had to help his dad with something.

Denver's streets are affiliated. We're not even hip to what this means, so we imagine wearing 3-D glasses with blue and red lenses where gangstas pop out of dimensions like ghosts, and Slimer throws gangs signs. Not everybody follows the classic examples of blue and red. Other gangs make their own colors with the teams on top. Denver Bronco gear should be neutral but it's not. Gangs fuck that up too. So how we supposed to be fans without gear? I guess Mo had the plan with the pencils. Nobody's gonna jack us for a pencil or a pencil sharpener, but you never know.

Red and blue are the colors of the Pepsi plant we pass on our way to St. Charles. We ride uphill, downhill, over broken glass shards and through steel structures. We arrive at St. Charles and it's just how Mo describes it: warm and friendly. An elder outside the front door is excited to see him.

"Hey Mo! Haven't seen you in a while, son, everything good?"

"Yeah, we moved to the North Side but I'm still hoopin' every day, Rich."

"That's good to hear. Cause all your crew be up here every day too, and they're also getting better."

"That's good," Mo says, nodding his head and smiling, "maybe they'll catch me one day."

"Boy I see your confidence hasn't waned none. Who's this?"

"This is my homie Gabe. I brought him to show him the gym."

"Oh, nice to meet 'ya G. Well come on in, I don't wanna hold you guys up."

We enter and Mo politics with more elders at the front desk.

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Everyone is upbeat and has positive vibes. I can see why this is the spot for Mo.

We roll up on a dude at the corner table working solo shot on a jigsaw puzzle. From behind he looks like a child. He's focused on the task at hand but when Mo slaps him on the shoulder it breaks his concentration. When he sees Mo, he smiles. His eyes are crossed naturally, and his head is shaped like a box, but it springs in excitement from the recognition Mo lays on him. This kid looks like an outcast, but Mo saw people, and that meant he saw Telley.

"Geranimo, where you been, hermano? The center's not the same without you. And school, too."

"We moved away but I'm back today. What you up to, Telley?"

"I've been working on this all day. Looks good, no? I have these edges set. You guys wanna help?"

"Not right now, Telley. We came to hoop."

"Oh, okay then. Score a lotta hoops, guys."

I'm surprised we didn't hit the gym first but now I know this is a reunion. Mo left a bunch when he moved to the North Side. A whole community of elders and kids, team players and volunteers.

The pounding basketball and squeakin' sneakers sound louder and louder as we make our way to the gym.

A kid bumps Mo's shoulder intentionally and spouts off, "HEY HOMIE! WATCH WHERE YOU WALKIN'!"

Mo turns around but is intercepted by Rich.

"Hey, hey, hey, chill out, Derrick. We don't do that type of stuff in here, son. And the black bandana's gotta go, either put it away or you can't be in here."

"Hey! THAT fool bumped into ME."

"Now don't play me like that, Derrick. Your brother Dion used to come in here all the time. I can call him if you want."

"You'll have to call the County, gee."

"Awe Derrick, I didn't know. He was a great athlete, I'm sorry."

"I'm not, he ain't no big brother to me. Fuck that foo—"

"ALRIGHT THAT'S IT! You can't talk like that in here! One more warning and you're out!

"Whateva gee, calm down. *You* the one asking about Dion. I'm not his dad . . ."

Not wanting to deal with Derrick any further Rich walks off. This kid is about the drama and they're giving him a lot of rope. But they must figure if this dude can't be at St. Charles, where else is he gonna go?

I turn around before we enter the gym and Derrick is still staring at us. Staring hard too. But once in the gym Mo smiles like we're standing on sacred ground.

I love that he's immune to this crazy fool, but this guy has me shitted. I've never been in a squabble and I don't want to be in one today. Mo walks smoothly as if navigating a minefield and starts jabbing at the six dudes playin' half-court 21. Of course he knows each one and their skill set. Mo asks me if I want to partake.

"Nah, I think I'm just gonna watch."

"Come on, man, we didn't come here for you to not get down."

"Alright then."

I act like I'm playin' defense but really I'm watchin' the entrance of the gym as if this fool will come barreling around the corner.

Maybe he's mad he couldn't bait Mo into a squabble. Or maybe some kids are just born to start shit.

Whatever the case, Mo operates on another plane. He's not afraid to remain confident.

Later, Mo's at game point and I'm thankful this fool hasn't shown his face in the gym yet.

We finish the game, say goodbyes but hear yelling in the hall-

way. It's Derrick, of course.

Somebody took the bait. I don't even want to look but move with the group into the hall. Mo has no part of the elders kicking Derrick out, and stands at the gym entrance with old friends, watching the commotion of elders who are threatening Derrick and another kid—who must've entered the center after we hit the gym—with calling the cops. Thankfully, that's the only thing getting them to leave. Derrick's partner in crime has a black bandana hanging from his back pocket but Rich and the elders are less concerned with the bandana and more set on throwing those two out.

Mo's friend says something funny and Mo starts laughing, it's not even about those two wannabes, but Derrick feels that Mo is laughing at him and doesn't take it lightly. He yells at Mo again.

"WHAT THA FUCK U LAUGHIN' AT, FOOL!"

But Derrick's partner in crime gets him to flee.

"C'MON D-MONEY, WE NEED TO JET BEFORE THE COPS COME!"

They slide out. The front doors of the center slam shut, and we can see the frustration in the elders.

"This is a safe place, man. What's happening?" says Rich to another elder.

"I agree, but it's getting harder to keep the riff raff out and keep the good ones in . . ."

Mo tells me later that Derrick was never good at sports. Derrick's brother Dion however, played against Mo and even showed him a couple moves, being that he was older. Dion teased Derrick in grade school that he threw like a girl, but once D-Money joined something called Tha Throwz, or 2T for short, he became untouchable.

I ask Mo if we can call someone for a ride back to his house, it's worth a shot.

"I don't want to head out there, those fools might be hiding in the bushes or some shit."

“What do you mean, man? We can do anything we want; go anywhere we want to go. Don’t worry about all that.” Well, if Mo says we’re good then we’re good. Rich walks us outside when Mo tells him we’re about to be Audi 5000. Rich stands with his hands on his hips as we mount our bikes.

“Don’t worry about him coming back, guys. He’d be foolish to come back here. And if he does, he betta act right... Alright Mo, great to see ya, man. Come back anytime.”

“Will do.”

“Nice to meet ya, G.”

“You, too.”

And Rich walks inside.

Mo wasn’t gonna waste time and worry about a wannabe with evil in his eyes. He had a city to explore and cassette tapes to play.

“So what did you think of St. Charles?” Mo asks, unaffected by the drama.

“Yo, I really dug it!” And I did. Seeing the excitement in Mo’s eyes made me forget about the ruckus. I’m happy he took me there, and I did feel safe. Nothing bad ever happens when I’m with Mo.

“I knew you would. Now, race you to the crib! . . .”

And Mo zooms off on his bike. I follow as quickly as I can and stay on his back wheel for most of the way.

When we’re close to Mo’s at around 40th & Osage we see a bunch of dudes on the corner in orange, green and white. People rockin’ Miami Hurricanes shit in Denver? What’s that about? Wait—they’re mean-muggin’ and stompin’ toward us. *Fast*. We turn around and jet, realizing that what we dodged in the East is the same beast with different colors in the North. We pedal hard while rubbernecking these dudes from our bikes. The group laughs and points. One launches a 40 at us that glides through the sky in a perfect spiral. It shatters behind us, but we keep pedaling. Eventually, the Miami Hurricane dudes are out of view.

I'M YOUR PUSHER

MO IS THE TASTEMAKER, the DJ, Hip Hop connoisseur, and his rotation is hard to crack: Kid N' Play's *2 Hype*, Heavy D & The Boyz' *Big Tyme*, Eazy-E's *Eazy Duz It*, and of course the *Power* album by Ice-T. The first time we ever heard of a natural high is from an Ice-T record. Ain't that somethin'? In this infamous new era of "Parental Advisory" stickers, the phrase only means that Mo advises his parents to buy him the newest, rawest, most groundbreaking music of the day. But do-gooders are busy trying to grasp the idea of gangsta rap and whether or not it's a passing fad. Of the three major networks, one in particular focuses on gangsta rap morning, noon, and night. NBC's Tom Brokaw delivers reports cautioning parents of violence and misogyny in the lyrics but luckily, our parents don't flinch. There's an emcee named Ice on the scene, and not the one you may be thinking of. This one has more hustler in his speech, we bump it nonstop.

The lyrics are printed out so we can follow along. Ice ain't hiding from nobody. So like broken glass to bare feet, or a razor-blade to a jump rope, these words become swords young fans like

us wield to the controlling systems, whether they be on the news or in the classroom.

"Ice-T is Superman," says Mo, "and his posse, Rhyme Syndicate, is the Justice League. Tell that fool Tom Brokaw he should skate!" Ice-T's *Power* album is replete with powerful messages about freedom of speech and even includes harsh warnings of the life. Out of the bunch, Mo plays it the most. More sophisticated than the rest, an overview of the game if you will, steering us in the right direction without being preachy.

Side B begins with Ice-T in the middle of a transaction. But where the buyer asks for something illegal, Ice promises dope-ness in the form of a 12" record. Mo loves the message he makes, even though politicians want to take down the messenger. Either way, the emcee proceeds to call crack stupid, adding that when he's on the mic spittin' dope rhymes, no beepers are needed.

"I bet'cha Ice-T does more good with his music than the 'Say No to Drugs' campaign can," Mo quips, but his taste in music is as eclectic as the groups in the rap world. His favorite line by far is from Hev's "We Got Our Own Thang," but Mo switches it up:

*"Throwing down lyrics like you throw down a flapjack,
you're a chicken-fried nugget and I'm a Big Stack!"*

That line is his go-to on the basketball court, tetherball, and four square. He drains a shot over your outstretched hand: "you're a chicken-fried nugget and I'm a Big Stack!" He ousts you in Four Square by inching the ball across a heavily guarded corner: "you're a chicken-fried nugget and I'm a Big Stack!" All that is left for you is to stand pat and watch that maroon ball roll into oblivion. But Mo also reserves a completely neurotic yell which induces psychological warfare on the court. The exuberant, "Owwwwwwwwww," with corresponding head gyrations Mo reserves for those days when he's in a zone and we can't stop him. Mo will look Pablo dead in the face and head-juke left, crossover right, drive to the rim right hand cupping the rock, pivoting on a dime and watch Pablo bite on the pump fake,

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calling bank before the shot. Next came, “Owwwwwwwwww!” Sometimes Pablo—physical prowess notwithstanding—just smiles and knows he has to take whatever Mo is dishing if he can’t stop him. Pablo musters a laugh sometimes, though clearly frustrated at Mo’s relentless taunts. But that’s how it is on the court: To the winner go the spoils.

* * *

Saturday morning begins like all the other Saturday mornings—watching Hip Hop videos. The living room in Mo’s house flaunts two circular bucket seats with a table in between. We’re enveloped in the big-pinned cushions of the bucket seats when Mo journeys to the kitchen to look for cereal. He then walks back into the living room.

“What we havin’?” I ask Mo, my eyes glued to the TV, but he walks by, ignoring my question then pounds on Cathy’s room a couple times.

“Mom, we don’t have no cereal!”

“Take some money from my purse and go to the corner store, baby.”

We know Cathy likes to sleep in on weekends and are more than down to venture into the crisp overcast morning. Parlaying to the store for cereal is an important task for two homies. I inhale deeply, holding my breath as Mo’s hand enters Cathy’s purse, and as if performing surgery, I don’t exhale until his hand completely removes her wallet. The screen door clangs against the door jam and we were out, Mo clutching the folded dollars in his hand like a hawk snatch. A makeshift store sits on the corner 40th & Pecos, one block south of the halfway house.

The halfway house is two levels high. Its yard area is surrounded by a low fence, so anyone walking by can see those dudes posted up smoking cigarettes. They look more confused

than mean, but then their confusion is scarier than anything we've seen.

"What's up, little homies. Where ya headed?" says a dude in the yard but we don't answer. Instead, we look at each other, wondering why this fool gives a damn about us or where we're going. We're not ignoring the dude; we just don't know what type of answer will suffice.

"WELL FORGET YOU GUYS, THEN!" Says the dude and I start walking faster, not wanting to turn around or make eye contact. Mo turns around and starts walking backwards to keep eyes on the homie, who knows if he'll jump the fence or what. We continue at an accelerated pace. I ask Mo if we're cool.

"Yeah, he's just looking at us, probably mad that he can't leave," Mo reassures, "we're ok."

We finally reach our destination. It's a rundown market made of dirty red bricks. The food aisle is bleak, but they have what we need, Mo's go-to: Cap 'N Crunch. When the clerk gives Mo the total, he tallies the dollars in his fist and inches out a few extras, grabbing a handful of Atomic Fireballs and placing 'em on the counter next to the cereal. On the way back we muse about what time we think Pablo might show up and hope that videos will still be rolling during breakfast.

"Nah bro, I don't wanna walk by that halfway house again."

"Ah man, forget that dude. We'll tell him we're on a nature walk or somethin'."

When we return to the house Mo places two bowls on the table between the big-pinned cushions then clinks a spoon into each. He pours Cap N' Crunch to the brim of his bowl and hands the box to me. Slowly poured milk elevates his cereal above the rim creating a mound of orange morsel goodness. Mo begins eating a spoonful while balancing the bowl in his left hand. I hurry and pour my cereal too. Mo's brother Ray Ray stumbles out of his room wiping his eye and stands smack dab in front of

the TV. Instead of Mo yelling at Ray Ray to get out the way, he asks him if he wants some cereal.

“Yes, please.”

“Well go get a bowl and spoon then.”

Ray Ray dutifully returns while the black and white polka-dotted wears of Heavy D’s “We Got Our Own Thang” comes on the screen. I glance down and—Shit! —there’s a roach in my cereal! It’s a smaller one albeit, but a roach, nonetheless. My thoughts race. Why did we buy cereal from an unkempt store? Why couldn’t there have been a Safeway nearby? Hell, if I would’ve known what would’ve come flying out of that cereal box, I would have talked Mo into hoofing it the ten blocks to Safeway on 48th. The cereal was probably there for ages!

Mo catches me looking down at my cereal and with a mouthful of Cap-N-Crunch mumbles something to the effect of, “S’good, right?!”

“Yeah,” I reply hesitantly, not wanting to ruin his breakfast but also not warning him like, “Dude, check your cereal for roaches!” Instead I freeze. My appetite gone. Now how to sneak this cereal into the kitchen to dump without getting a lecture from Mo about wasting the Cap ‘N Crunch?

After heaving my cereal into the trash can and strategically placing some trash over the mess, I come back from the kitchen and slide into my bucket seat with the big-pinned cushion without making a sound. The guilt of not saying anything begins to swell inside of me and I tell Mo about the roach. He takes his eyes off the TV to look at me, still gnashing his teeth on Cap ‘N Crunch as milk coats the edges of his lips. Grinning slightly, he says, “Did you pluck it out?”

