

Let's begin with the unflattering part. I was a brat from the start. Of course, all kids act out. Some kick, some thrash, and some ball up like little bugs. Me? I liked to *throw* things.

My Uncle Sam (yes, that was his name) once said I grazed his head with a strawberry before I could even speak. I tossed a milk carton out the window at a Michigan daycare because it wasn't my usual chocolate flavor. Not long after that, I stepped away from my fifth birthday party to hurl a half-dozen 45 records against the brick wall in my family's backyard. The reason? I'd learned one of my friends had already turned five. To the casual observer, my parents—Joel and Louise Weaver—had their hands full. However, the observer also needed to understand that our family had lived in five different homes by the time I was ten. When my folks broke the news, my reaction wasn't pretty. If I couldn't throw an object, I'd throw a fit.

My little sister, Justine, emulated my frustration as soon as she could talk. Instead of being annoyed by this, I welcomed it. I finally had an ally—it would be two against two from then on.

Eventually, Mom and Dad employed synonyms for the dreaded “M” word. Yet their clever attempt to soften the blow only created more frustration.

“*Plant new roots?*” I asked. “Can you explain?”

“Yeah,” Justine said, crossing her arms. “Can you *eggs*-plain?”

All of this leads me to a Pennsylvania evening in the winter of 1975. By this time, I was eleven, and Justine was eight. Looking back, maybe we should've seen it coming. Coasters, coffee table books, and ashtrays—all part of the ordinary living room landscape—had been stowed away. It wasn't because of some post-holiday cleaning. It was a defense strategy.

Justine and I were playing Monopoly on the living room floor. Mom was curled up on a nearby sofa reading a paperback called *Atlas Shrugged* (I wondered why anyone would write a book about someone *shrugging*). Meanwhile, Dad was in his favorite chair, flipping through the *Wall Street Journal* like usual after dinner. He suddenly cleared his throat and set the newspaper on the floor.

“Hey, gang, let's have a brief discussion,” he said pleasantly.

Mom gestured for us to sit on the sofa, so we did. She closed her book, vacated her spot, and went to stand beside Dad.

“Your Mom and I want to share something with you,” Dad said.

Mom placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. Something felt off, too staged, and somehow I just knew —

“We're moving!” I exclaimed, hopping to my feet.

“No!” Justine echoed, rising beside me.

My parents turned to each other in disbelief.

“How could he possibly know?” Dad asked.

“I didn’t say a word,” Mom replied.

I looked around for something to throw. *Dang*. Where was everything?

“Did he see you move the ashtray?” Dad asked.

“How could he? He was at school,” Mom insisted.

“I don’t even know why you guys have ashtrays,” Justine said. “Neither one of you smokes.”

“All right, enough!” Dad bellowed. “I said discussion, not rebellion. Now, both of you sit your fannies down.”

Whenever Dad used a substitute word for buttocks, like “fanny,” “rear end,” “rump,” or the French one (“derriere”), we knew he was close to blowing his stack. Justine and I dropped onto the sofa, and that’s when my folks hit us with the news: we were moving to Massachusetts. They might as well have said Belgium—it felt that foreign. I begged for another location.

“Yeah, anywhere but there,” Justine added. I doubted she knew the difference between Boston and Brussels, but as always, I was thankful for the support.

“I once had a substitute teacher from Boston,” I argued. “Mrs. McQueeney. She’d say things like, ‘Let’s go ovah the ansahz heeya.’”

“What did he just say?” Justine asked, her face scrunched in a knot.

I threw up my hands. “See? We’re gonna flunk!”