

Leather

by David Cotrone

When I was 17, they said in an e-mail that you would get too drunk to function and that you would abuse them, verbally, and do way more than embarrass them in public. They said you'd yell at them and hit their mom for any reason. They put a restraining order on you. But you were my uncle, my favorite relative, my brother's too. We were eight and you were much older, and in 1999 we cruised through Braintree in your Ford, rocking to Petty, or sometimes Springsteen. You called my brother "Spike" and you called me "Fag" and we called you by your name.

One November morning, many years earlier, you took us to the park to play with your golden retriever and to fly kites. You wore your tatty leather jacket and puffed on Marlboros. You told us about the time you severed your right thumb while snow-blowing, and the time when you were stopped by someone in an airport, and that person said you looked like Sean Penn with Down's syndrome, and you told that person to fuck himself.

You asked to be my godfather so my mother said yes. You were always generous in blessing me with outrageous birthday presents — a backscratcher, water glasses inscribed with the phrase, "Give it to me baby, uh huh, uh huh." Whenever my father told you that these objects might be useless (in jest), you called him a fag, and told him that he had a small penis (in jest).

A few years later you came over for Christmas with your daughters, and you had been drinking. You told everyone that Sambuca makes your shit turn green. Your daughters asked if they could leave, and they told you they never wanted to see you again. They left with their mom. You brought me outside and told me to never be like you, and then you left. And I never saw, or heard, from you again.

Now, I think of you whenever I'm walking downtown, when I hear a car drive by, rocking to Petty. I think of that morning we walked up the path to your house, back when you had a family. Your wife

answered the door. The kitchen was bright. It smelled like coffee and brownies. Your golden retriever hurried over. You instructed “up,” caught him by the paws, and hugged him. You turned your head, smiled, and asked how we were.

