

# A Little Bit Peter

by Kel McIntyre



*The whole idea of it makes me feel  
like I'm coming down with something,  
something worse than any stomach ache  
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light--  
a kind of measles of the spirit,  
a mumps of the psyche,  
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.*

-Billy Collins, "On Turning Ten"

When I was sixteen, I went to a party with my sister's boyfriend, Paul. It was a party filled with Spanish people who apparently party in a much different way than we boring ol' white ones. While I was there, they dressed me up in a ruffly red and black flamenco dress, shoved a flower behind my ear and castanets on my fingertips, and made me dance in the middle of a courtyard filled with strangers. Can you say olé?

My parents have been together since 1971. For the past ten years, their interaction has been minimal.

"Gotta take a break. I wanna play in the rain." These are lyrics from a 7Up commercial circa 1987 that my best friend, Chris, and I used to scream-sing while we took a break from hanging around the house and (innovative, I know) played in the rain.

My sons, Griffin and Keifer, are eleven and nine, respectively.

In the remake of the film *Freaky Friday*, Anna, a free-spirited teenager, is in a band, has skunk-striped hair, and likes punk rock. Anna cannot get along with her mother, Tess. Tess is stodgy and conservative and likes to wear neutral-colored clothes and a dour expression. She doesn't support Anna's band and thinks anything Tess finds important is silly and immature. Tess is a "fun sucker."

Once we were old enough to drive, Chris and random friends and I went to Denny's on Friday and Saturday nights. We sat for hours, drinking coffee and dipping deep fried items into a ramekin full of ranch dressing.

Griffin likes to put his Star Wars action figures in various positions around his bedroom and enact battle scenes. This entertains him for a ridiculous amount of time. Keifer enjoys drawing objects, cutting them out, and using them as if they are the actual objects portrayed. Both boys go crazy for some tag-like game called manhunt; they play it for hours.

When I was fifteen, I hung out at a friend's house on New Year's Eve and ate grapes at midnight; it doesn't sound special, but to this day, it's one of the best New Year's Eves I've had.

#### My Mother's Routine, 2004-present

1. Weekdays, Weekends, and Holidays
  - A. Morning
    1. Sleep
  - B. During the day
    1. Sleep
    2. Wake up between noon and 3:00 p.m.
    3. Complain about her Fibromyalgia
    4. Smoke the first of many cigarettes
    5. Drink coffee
    6. Complain about her Fibromyalgia
    7. Brush teeth
    8. Alternate between sleeping, eating, and complaining about her Fibromyalgia

### C. Evening

1. Alternate between sleeping, eating, and complaining about her Fibromyalgia
2. Go to sleep between midnight and 5:00 a.m.

“My Generation,” by The Who, is the anthem of a generation. In it, Roger Daltrey stutters-sings that he is sick of (old) people putting his generation down because they g-g-get around.

My fifty-seven-year-old father, who used to own a bar and stay out all night carousing with his friends, who used to be one of the top-rated dart players in Chicago, rarely leaves his computer room. He sits there in gray gym shorts that cover his big, egg-shaped belly, socks pulled up to mid-calf, surfing the Internet and playing games. He no longer owns a dartboard.

Griffin and Keifer recently went to a Weezer concert with my husband, Glenn, and me. When the singer threw beach balls into the audience, Griffin jumped up and down and screamed so frantically, you’d think they were beach balls made of gold.

My first car was a Fiat X-19 named Black Bullet. It was an old car of my dad’s that he deemed not good enough to drive and abandoned beneath our carport. When I turned sixteen, I forked over about a thousand dollars to get it running. The Black Bullet was small enough to fit in my pocket and so low to the ground that when I drove through super-high puddles, water would seep through the rusted floorboards, soaking my shoes and, occasionally, my lap. The Black Bullet was the best car ever.

“You take the good, you take the bad, you take them both, and there you have the facts of life.” *The Facts of Life*, a TV show from the eighties with a really catchy theme song, focused on schoolgirls Blaire, Jo, Nathalie, and Tootie, who always managed to get themselves into trouble but thankfully had the older, wiser Mrs. Garrett around to show them the error of their silly, adolescent ways.

I was looking through my father’s high school yearbooks one day, and there he was, in picture after picture, representing club after club and organization after organization. Page after page was filled with messages and signatures from what looked to be almost every student in attendance at Lakeview High School in 1969. Several years later and just a few years ago, my mom mentioned that she couldn’t find my dad’s yearbooks, and

when she asked him where they were, he told her that he had thrown them away because he didn't want any reminders of what he once was.

After high school, Chris moved to Gainesville and then to Colorado; Tawny took her place. Tawny and I spent Tuesday nights at Red Room, Wednesday and Friday nights at The Edge, and Thursday and Saturday nights at The Kitchen. If we weren't at a club, we were at the Mudhouse, drinking green tea and playing Scattergories whilst tripping on LSD. Once the Mudhouse closed down, we moved on to The Nocturnal Café and cocaine.

Another thing my sons love is the Alphabet Game. In the Alphabet Game, we choose a subject—say jobs—and, starting with the letter 'A,' name jobs starting with the next letter of the alphabet. A game with Griffin, Keifer, Glenn, and me might go something like this:

Griffin will say, *I'm first! Astronomer.*

Okay, I'll say. *Bartender. Kei?*

*Corn peeler!*

*Corn peeler's not a job,* Glenn will say.

*Okay, chocolate wrapping person!*

After a statement like this, Griffin and Keifer will laugh hysterically.

*I'm not playing if you can't be serious,* Glenn will say.

*All right,* Keifer will say. *Clown.*

*Dentist,* Glenn will say.

*Elephant trainer,* Griffin will say.

*Flute player,* I'll say. *Kei?*

*Giraffe washer!* he'll say, and he'll laugh like a madman.

*That's not a job!* Glenn will say. *If you want to play, say real jobs.*

I think you get the idea.

If we weren't at a club or some dirty coffeehouse, Tawny and I were at the News Café eating Brie and crackers or strawberries and whipped cream. At the end of our nights, we always drove westward to avoid the rising sun. One night/morning, while tripping and heading toward the Everglades, the following verse was born (judge not the poetry—I was on

drugs):

I want to roll in the grass

Get ladybugs in my hair

Squish berries beneath my bare feet

Life is not a school zone

I will not slow down

An adult who behaves like a child and believes fun is the most important thing in life is said to have a Peter Pan complex because, clearly, adult life has nothing to do with having fun.

*Yo' mama's so fat, Obi Wan-Kenobi said, 'That's not a moon, that's yo' mama!'* This joke makes Griffin and Keifer laugh uncontrollably, as do most yo' mama jokes. Knock-knock jokes reign pretty high up on their list of amusement, as well.

Going out to eat was the one thing my mother loved. Two to three times a week, my family ate out when I was growing up, and by the time I was nine, my favorite foods were escargot and profiteroles. For the past ten to fifteen years, too tired from too much sleep and too stiff from doing nothing, my mother has mostly forsaken restaurants, content to take trip after trip to the freezer and stove, eating a pot of melted butter like it's soup and sucking on so many popsicles, her lips swell.

I was twenty-one when I first saw the Florida Panthers' rookie left-winger Radek Dvorak, and I was twenty-one and a few seconds older when my black and white vision turned to Technicolor. Totally set on finding a way to insinuate myself into his life, I participated in many a high-speed chases with Radek. As much as I loved him, though, he was hardly the only one for me. Past boy-related activities include, but are not limited to, following Joey Ramone from The Ramones around Fort Lauderdale; forcing a meeting with Tom Keifer, the singer of Cinderella; driving up and down the streets of Fort Lauderdale's residential neighborhoods searching for a certain waiter's sparkly blue jeep; and staying at the Mudhouse until it closed at five a.m. and then helping the help wash the dishes several times a week to get the attention of a counter boy named Mitch.

Being a soccer mom is the quintessential sign that a woman has matured—well, that and a short, sensible haircut. In fact, Everclear has a song called “Volvo Driving Soccer Mom” about that very thing. When the mom in the song is young, she's a bad girl, banging people at her high school prom, having threesomes, and dabbling in porn. As an adult, she

trades in her wild ways for conservative ideals and a Swedish vehicle with a five-star safety rating.

Keifer has played soccer for five years, so I begrudgingly must admit that I'm a soccer mom. I also have short hair, though I don't know how sensible one would call it since it's actually a shaved head, save for the bangs, which go from blue to pink to purple on an almost-weekly basis.

Tawny moved. She fell for a pastor, became a Baptist, and has three kids. She lived in some foot-washing Baptist town in the Midwest the last time we talked, which was about five years ago. Last year I heard that she moved back to South Florida, is very involved with her church, and has no interest in reconnecting with old friends. More recently, I saw that she's now on Facebook. If I held my breath waiting for a friend request, I'd be dead by now.

Griffin is going to invent a hovercraft that's accessible to anybody interested in having a hovercraft. He's absolutely positive that he will invent this. Keifer plans to live in a four-story house with a pool on the roof, a tree house on stilts, a petting zoo, and a floating pizza parlor. He's going to be a rock star, a doctor, and an actor, as well.

When I was young, I wanted to be a writer and move back to Chicago. I now teach high school English and live in Davie. Yeehaw.

I don't even know the last time I ate at a Denny's, and because I don't want to be the fattest person in existence, I haven't had mayonnaise in years; alas, ranch dressing is nothing but a fond, creamy memory. French fries, though, I refuse to forgo.

According to my mom, she and my father have not had sex in fifteen years.

*The Breakfast Club* is arguably the most significant movie of my generation. In this film, the lives of five very different high school students merge in Saturday detention. Though these five students come from vastly different backgrounds and clash with one another at the onset of the movie, they eventually find they have one thing in common: they vehemently distrust and dislike adults. To their horror, they realize that as they mature, they will be just like their parents. According to Allison, "It's unavoidable...when you grow up, your heart dies."

My latest obsession is Tom DeLonge, lead singer of Angels and Airwaves and Blink-182. I've spent many an hour looking for pictures of him on Google Images and watching him in video clips on YouTube. Last

week when Angels and Airwaves played in Pompano Beach, I spent an extra twenty dollars to go to sound check, which ended two hours before the doors were officially scheduled to open for the show. What's a girl with a history of stalking to do when she has two hours to kill and the object of her obsession is merely yards—yards!—away? I don't know what other girls would do, but this former stalker retreated to Starbucks for a fat-free, no whip Café Mocha, content—okay, *almost* content—to look at pictures of Tom on her cell phone.