

Adam Matson
Glory Holes

A few years before Grampa died, he told us all a pretty fucked-up story. The whole family was gathered at Grampa and Gramma's house in Massachusetts for Thanksgiving. We were young kids, Dougie, Ava, Tyler, Madison, Adam, and me; Tyler, the oldest, was twelve. We loved huddling around the digital fireplace for one of Grampa's classic yarns.

Grampa leaned back in his recliner, and we all sat cross-legged on the floor at his feet. Ava was the youngest, so she got to keep the bottle cap from Grampa's beer. She flicked it up in the air and caught it as Grampa took a chin-dribbling swig.

"This story goes way back," he began. "To the days of the Great Recession. 2008. Before any of you, or even your parents, were even born."

"How old are you, Grampa?" Ava squeaked.

"Old enough," Grampa replied. "The Great Recession was a time of economic desperation for the United States. Some criminals in the big Wall Street banks figured out how to bilk the American people out of their life savings, and their futures, by selling them mortgages at flagrantly inflated interest rates. When nobody could pay their mortgages, the housing market collapsed, and the country sank into recession."

"What's recession?" Dougie asked.

"It means nobody was making any money," said Grampa. He let out a long, breathy sigh. "It was partially my fault, too. I worked for a company called Freddie Mac. I sold thousands of Americans mortgages they couldn't afford. And when the recession hit, millions of people lost their jobs. I was one of them." His eyes misted over a little. "Guess I deserved it."

"Why'd you sell people something they couldn't afford?" Tyler asked.

"That's the way it was back then," said Grampa. "We were greedy, selfish materialists. We had no souls. I was twenty-five years old. When I lost my job, I couldn't afford my apartment. Had to move back home with my parents."

"What's so bad about that?" Madison asked.

"It was a nightmare. I lasted about two months. Then I said to my old man: 'Pa, I'm hittin' the road.' Had no money. No job. No plan. Didn't know what was out there waiting for me. Just knew I'd find it somewhere in America."

He polished off his beer, stared down into the empty bottle. "Ava, honey, run in the kitchen, get me another brew."

Ava jumped up and sprinted out of the living room. Grampa squinted into the digital fireplace, waiting for her to return. Dougie picked something out of his belly button, and ate it.

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When Ava returned with the beer, Grampa twisted the cap off with his teeth and tossed it to her.

"Hey, that's not fair," Madison said. "She already got one."

Grampa frowned. "You'll get the next one, Maddy," he promised.

Ava stuck out her tongue, clinking her two bottle caps around in her small fingers.

"Back in the early years of the twentieth century," Grampa resumed. "If you had no money, and you wanted to travel, you rode the bus. I had to sell my car for travel expenses. Bought a ticket on the Bolt Bus. Thought I could get to California and look for a job. You kids ever hear of the Bolt Bus?"

"No," we all sang.

"The old Bolt was like the Mayflower," Grampa said. "There were rats, and lice, and disease. We threw the corpses of the dead right out the window, without pulling over."

"Eww," said Ava.

Grampa winked at us. "It was pretty bad," he said. "The only respite for a tired soul on a long, cross-country bus trip was a rest stop." He took another long sip of beer, his eyes shining now. "Rest stops, kids. I'll tell ya, after five- or six-hundred miles wedged into a window seat, your legs cramped and numb, breathing in your neighbors' farts, a rest stop was like an oasis in the desert."

"Farts," Dougie said, laughing.

"Oh, there were farts," said Grampa. "First rest stop we came to was just outside of Albany, New York- town called Schenectady."

One by one we tried to pronounce it.

"Schenectady," Grampa repeated. "Rolls right off the tongue, once you learn it. I was so happy to see that rest stop, I virtually ran in there, straight for the bathroom. Found the first open urinal, and unleashed a stream. I had never felt so relieved. So what if the urinal was already full of other people's piss, and chewed gum, and cigarettes. That bathroom was like a palace to me." He grinned, his mind lost somewhere amidst stained porcelain and cracked tiles. "That's when I saw it."

Adam inched a little closer to Grampa's feet. "Saw what, Grampa?"

"I had the urinal next to the first stall," Grampa said. "And as I stood there, relieving myself, feeling pretty happy to be alive, I saw the little hole. Like someone had put a small, tight fist right through the stall. The glory hole."

We all looked at each other.

"The what?" Madison asked.

"You kids may never see a glory hole," Grampa continued. "Since public restrooms were abolished in 2022. But back in the good old days, 2008-hell, all the way back to the 1980s, when glory holes were invented, a man

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could stand in a bus station rest room, or the bathroom of a seedy bar, and see a little hole about this high." He held his hand about three feet off the ground.

"What was it for?" Dougie asked.

"What do you think it was for?" said Tyler.

"I don't like this," said Madison.

Grampa pointed his beer bottle at Tyler, as if the two of them knew something the rest of us didn't.

"It was for your ding dong," Grampa said.

We all stared at him in disbelief.

"That's right," he said. "You unzipped your pants, pulled out your rod, stepped up to the wall, and poked yourself into the hole."

"You put your penis in the hole?!" Dougie cried.

"Sure did," Grampa said. "You sure did."

We were all pretty confused, but now nobody would look at each other.

"Then what happened?" Dougie asked.

"You never knew," said Grampa. "That was the thrill. Maybe nothing happened, and you just stood there with your dick wigglin'. But once in a while, if the gods were smiling upon thee, you'd get a little action. Someone might give you a nice handshake. Or a couple of good pinches. Or, if you were really lucky, somebody might suck you off."

"Suck you what?" someone asked. I can't remember who.

Grampa leaned back, momentarily retreating into his beer. "The early twenty-first century was a time of great loneliness and despair," he mused. "Back then we did whatever we could for affection. Stuck our dicks into dark holes, just hoping for a little human connection. It was either that, or try to meet people over the Internet."

"What's the Internet?" Madison asked.

"It's what Facebook used to be called."

"Oh."

"Grampa," Dougie said, his face scrunched up like he might cry. "I don't understand. Why would you put your penis into a dark hole?"

"Because it felt good, pal. That's what life's all about. Feeling good."

"I want a glory hole!" shouted Adam, who was eight, and always had his hand down his pants. "I stick my penis in my desk at school all the time!"

Grampa ruffled Adam's hair. "You would have fit right in in 2008."

Ava stared confusedly at her bottle caps. "But, Grampa," she whispered. "I don't have a penis."

"Things were definitely harder for women back then," Grampa said.

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"Women could only participate in one side of the glory hole. But that was when people started blurring gender boundaries, using any bathrooms they wanted. You could easily find a woman on the other end of a glory hole."

"What if someone bit you?" Madison asked.

Nobody answered her.

"I hit every rest stop between Boston and Boise," Grampa said. "Found glory holes everywhere I went. Chicago; Des Moines, Iowa; Ohio. Those Ohio glory holes were the best. You kids ever wonder why they call Ohio 'the Buckeye State?'"

"Gross," said Tyler.

"Then I got out west," Grampa said. "And there weren't as many rest stops. People did live out west in 2008, when there was still fresh water. But they were all spread out. Back then a rest stop was like a gathering place. Like Church. People came from miles around in search of a glory hole. Hell, by the time I got to Utah, I was so desperate I had started cutting a glory hole into the seatback in front of me, with a ball-point pen. By that point, I was eating candy bars out of vending machines. Wasn't sure if I'd have enough cash to make California." He sighed, staring into his beer again. A far-off look came into his eye. "Before long, my worst fears came true." He finished the beer, set the bottle down beside his chair. "Ava, how about one more beer, honey?"

Ava stood up, not as eagerly as she had before, and jogged into the kitchen. The rest of us squirmed beside the digital fire. Adam now had both hands down his pants.

Grampa twisted the cap off his fresh beer, handed it to Madison.

"No, thanks," Madison said.

Grampa shrugged. "I ran out of money in Elko, Nevada," he said, squinting again, as if peering into the past. "You kids won't ever see Elko, because it burned to the ground in 2025. But I can tell you, it was the worst place on Earth. Two hundred miles from civilization, in any direction. Nothing but brothels and casinos and liquor stores. I had no money to keep riding the Bolt, so I had to get off. I grabbed my duffel bag, slung that old heavy bastard over my shoulder, and started walking into town. Didn't know if I'd even find a place to sleep that night. Everywhere I looked there were homeless bums, toothless and barefoot, picking cigarette butts off the ground. I couldn't go into any of the brothels or casinos- those places only wanted your money. But I knew there was always one place a man could go to collect his thoughts. To sit in a pool of his own misery, sometimes a pool of his own urine, and try to scrape what few mental resources he could muster into anything resembling a plan. A restaurant called Jack in the Box."

"We learned about Jack in the Box in school," said Tyler. "President Bieber made them illegal in 2030."

"For the public good," Grampa said. "But back in the late-aughts, everybody ate there. Like how everyone smoked cigarettes in the 1950s. Well, I rolled into that Jack in the Box with nothing but my duffel and a

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handful of change. Figured I'd try to hustle myself one last meal, before I was broke. I had a pair of Nike basketball shoes, and I sold them to a casino gambler for ten bucks. Ten bucks could get you a feast at Jack in the Box. I went up to the counter, ordered a couple burgers, fries, and a Coke. Sat down in a booth, away from everyone else in the place, and just stared out the window, wondering what the hell I was going to do next.

"Well, Jack in the Box being what it was, an hour or so passed, and soon I felt the urgent need to visit the facilities. I hurried into the com-mode. Took my duffel bag with me- if I'd left it in the booth, some degenerate would've stolen it. So I'm in the bathroom, hunched in the stall, duffel on my lap, the cheeseburgers working their magic... when all of a sudden I turn to the wall, and what do I see next to the toilet paper dispenser?"

"A glory hole!" Adam cried.

"A glory hole," Grampa said. "I knew my luck was about to change. I was broke, stuck in the middle of the desert, in the worst restaurant, in the worst little town on Earth, but I had found a glory hole. And by God, I was going to use it. So I stood up, and thrust my old cock through that hole."

He smiled for a long time, casually sipping his beer.

"What happened?" Dougie asked.

"It was the luckiest day of my life," Grampa said. "I just stood there for a moment, wagging in the breeze, when suddenly I felt a big, wet python, squeezing itself around my junk. Whoever, or whatever, it was, on the other side of that wall, had the biggest tongue I'd ever encountered, and worked it like they were trying to suck me through the wall. I'd been to glory holes all over the United States- including the glory hole capital, Tulsa, Oklahoma- but I'd never experienced a ride like this one. I went to Heaven that day, kids. Heaven."

He took a deep breath, wiping his brow.

"When it was over, I could barely stand. I grabbed my duffel bag, and staggered out of that stall. And then the door to the next stall opened, and a woman stepped out. She had on a little too much make-up, had a little too much rubber in her tires, but she had a smile a mile wide, and by god, she was the most beautiful gal I'd ever seen."

The digital fire went fuzzy for a moment. Tyler kicked it, re-stabilizing the image. Grampa set his third beer bottle down on the floor, clapped a hand on his ample gut. We kids all looked at each other, silent, wondering if the story was over.

Grampa walked into the living room. "Turkey's on the table," she said. "Come and get it."

Nobody moved a muscle.

"What's going on in here?" she asked.

Nobody answered.

Grampa gazed up at her and grinned. "I was just telling the kids how we met," he said.