

Checking In

Carl Pelofsky

“Can I see a picture ID?”

It was David’s first time at the Hampton Inn. The lobby was filled with pre-teen soccer players and their parents, kicking a ball around and sliding on the floor marked “wet.” David reached into his wallet and pulled out his driver’s license.

“Arkansas?” the manager said. “Don’t see a lot of that around here.”

“Ten-to-one the guy goes in the back office,” said Harold, David’s friend and companion. The two of them were in Seattle to see a Mariners game. A true baseball fan, David had briefly played for the Mets years ago, and he and Harold decided to travel the country to see one game in each of the 32 major league baseball stadiums.

At that moment the manager turned around and headed back into the office. David handed Harold a crumpled dollar bill.

“How did you know?” David asked.

“He had that look about him.”

The manager returned with three other Hampton Inn employees. They stood alongside him.

“Do you have a credit card?” asked the manager.

David removed a Visa from his wallet and handed it over. The manager looked at it closely and shared it with the other employees. They huddled together like football players.

“How about a third form of identification?”

David pulled out an insurance card. It was Blue Cross, the HMO.

“Do you have a fourth form of identification?”

David pulled out his business card. David Heller, CPA.

“Do you have a fifth form of identification?”

David pulled out his Little Rock Community Library Card. He had a balance of three dollars and twelve cents for two overdue books: *The Tropic of Capricorn* and *White Teeth*.

“Do you have a sixth form of identification?”

David pulled out a punch card from Subway. He was one foot-long sub away from a free sandwich.

“Do you have a seventh form of ID?”

David reached in his pocket and removed a tiny picture album. There were hundreds of photographs in it, maybe thousands, many dating back to when he was a newborn in the hospital. Miniature versions of his school pictures from kindergarten to senior year filled the pages, along with photos from every sports team he ever played on. As a child he played soccer, baseball and basketball, and David was frequently the kid who posed on one knee for the pictures.

The album had dozens of pictures from his college days at Baylor, many of which were incriminating and should have been destroyed years earlier, but that nevertheless captured a certain moment in time. Not his proudest, but still.

Then inside the tiny album, another tinier album filled with wedding photos. He and his wife, Patricia, were married near Galveston, where she was born and raised. It was a fairly small wedding. He remembered it being really hot. David smiled in his photos, but sweat soaked through his shirt and his black tuxedo.

Inside that tinier album David had placed baby photos of his own children, three of them, and their school photos. Many of them included Patricia, often playing at the park down the street or feeding them cake from one of their birthday parties.

Later in the tiny album David had pictures of his second wife, Susan, who he had married after Patricia left him for one of their neighbors. It was fairly scandalous news on the block, so much so that David and his children moved shortly after it all was discovered. Susan told him that she still loved him, but that the neighbor just made her feel a way she had never felt before. David didn't ask a lot of questions.

And then there were pictures of the children's high school graduations, and their college graduations, and then of their children, his grandchildren, and pictures David took of himself in the mirror, his skin wrinkled, his eyes drooping, his hair graying.

"Thank you," the manager said, handing the album back. "I have you in room 312. The elevator is around the corner. There's a vending machine on the fourth floor."

David put the album back in his wallet and turned to Harold.

“I’m not sure why they wanted all that,” he said.

“I’m not sure either,” Harold said. “Just making sure you were who you said you were I guess.”