

## Original prelude (March, 2014)

Prelude: 1979

The first memory I have of my parents is from when I was around 5 years old. A memory so burned into my brain by fear and horror that it is still vivid, and still brings me awake some nights in a cold sweat.

Every summer, we would vacation at Deep Creek Lake, in western Maryland. I would play with my toys, my parents would drink, and we'd just unwind for a week or two. I enjoyed the nature, and the lakeshore, and my parents would always rent a speedboat and motor endlessly around the lake.

Deep Creek Lake is a manmade lake, backed up behind a dam. That early memory starts as we drift near the dam, my mom and dad chain smoking and knocking back beers. They cut off the engine and wait a few moments, sharing mischievous looks, while I watch the water and stare in awe at the large structure of the dam. We're maybe a football field away from the dam when mom leans down and tells me a story:

"There once was a family just like ours," she said, "mommy, daddy, and a little boy. They used to always visit the lake, just like we do. Then, one day, something terrible happened..."

She let the tension build, the boat drifting closer to the dam, my father watching me levelly.

After a few minutes, the dam now filling my vision, mom continued, "They were lost. They got sucked under the dam, and nobody knew what happened to them until, weeks later, they found their boat far down the river," she stretched her arm out towards the dam and beyond to the hardscrabble woods of western Maryland. "All that was left were three skeletons. Mommy, daddy, and a little boy..."

We drifted closer and closer, and then mom laughed good naturedly and went to start the motorboat's engine. She turned the key and nothing happened. A look of alarm spread across her face and she tried again, then again. Then she rushed back to the motor and pulled the emergency ripcord. The engine choked and sputtered but didn't start. Her voice low, shaking, she called my dad over and he tried to start the engine with the emergency ripcord. One, two, three pulls on the chain, the motor coughing but never coming to life.

Mom turned to me, her face a mask of terror, “It won’t start...oh my god...oh my god...” she clung to my father, who grimly stared at the engine.

We were now close enough to the dam for the warning signals to start sounding – great, booming klaxons that screamed through the air. We were close enough to see people moving, watching from the shore and the control towers, close enough to see the water being sucked towards the dam, to feel the boat pick up speed. I began to cry, succumbing to a terror I feel keenly even now as I write this, as I summon these hideous memories, and the lifetime of nightmares they have fueled.

Then mom started laughing. She playfully punched my dad on the shoulder who, grinning, chuckling under his breath, took his seat at the wheel and turned the keys. The engine started up right away and, with the klaxons still blaring, he turned the boat and sped away from the dam.

I cried all the way back to the hotel docks. Eventually, mom got tired of my bawling and sneered at me to shut up. “Little boys don’t cry!” she shouted. Then she began screaming at my dad. They fought viciously through the hotel lobby and up to our room, my mom screaming about how horrible he was with me, and he just meekly nodding and mumbling, “Sorry Barb, sorry Barb...”

He packed up his bags that night and went home, and mom spanked me for causing a scene. When she was particularly mad, as she was that night, she would turn her diamond rings around and spank me until I bled.

This is the story of my family, the ice cream company they built and destroyed, the greed-gripped people who have stolen my name, and a legacy that has haunted me for three decades.

