

MY TRIP TO THE STATE PEN

By Monica Bauer

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CHARACTER

Gretchen (F), a precocious kindergarten student

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Audience Favorite Award, Short Attention Span PlayFEST, Atlantis Playmakers, Billerica, MA, 2005

The Seven Ages Festival, The Center for the Arts in Natick, MA, 2005

PRODUCTION NOTES

This is a first-person monologue by a five year old, but should not be performed in a childish manner. Gretchen is smarter than many adults, and both innocence of childhood and the pain of an adult's sensitivity towards being an outsider should be part of a successful performance.

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by
Monica Bauer

My kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hollowinski, asked us if any of us had ever been on a trip going somewhere special, outside of Omaha. Not many kids had, so it was kinda quiet. I figured, I should tell about *my* trip, so I raised my hand. And I told them all about the trips we take every single Sunday to the State Capital, which is Lincoln.

Mrs. Hollowinski said, “That’s nice, dear, but why do you go every Sunday? Are you visiting a relative?”

And I said, yes, we were visiting my brother Billy in the State Pen.

And the kids wanted to know what that meant, but Mrs. Hollowinski got all excited and tried to call on somebody else, but the kids wanted to know, and all of a sudden I was the center of attention. I like being the center of attention. That’s what my adopted mother says all the time, and I think it’s the truth.

So the kids were so noisy ‘cause they wanted to hear about the State Pen, that after awhile Mrs. Hollowinski gave up, and asked me to go ahead and finish my story.

And this is what I told them. The State Pen is a place where they keep people cooped up, like chickens in a Pen, which is why they call it the State Pen. It has nothing to do with pens and pencils. I don’t think they let Billy even keep real pens in the State Pen. The point is to keep people all penned up.

The kids wanted to know why Billy was in the Pen, so I told them. Some of the people they keep penned up because they are really bad, but some are there because they are really stupid. That’s what my adopted Dad says all the time, that if Billy wasn’t so stupid, he wouldn’t be in the Pen.

Then one of the kids in the back started cryin’ real loud, Bobby Swoboda. Because he really is stupid, for example, he tried to eat the class goldfish. And he started cryin’ that they were gonna come and take HIM away to the State Pen. That’s when Mrs. Hollowinski had to calm him down by tellin’ him that you don’t go to the Pen just for bein’ stupid. You had to do something real bad, too.

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Then the kids were all excited for me to say what Billy did that was real bad. But I didn't think it was real bad. See, he stole some pieces of paper from somebody who was real mean to him, and these pieces of paper were called checks. And you could write on them, and they turned into money. So Billy was turning these pieces of paper into money.

Maybe the stupid part is, Billy had to write this other man's name in order to make the whole thing work, but he took the pieces of paper down to the drug store, where they all know his name is Billy, and he wrote this other guy's name on the checks. Wasn't that a silly thing to do?

So now Billy is in the State Pen, and every Sunday we bring him fried chicken, and we all make it kinda like a picnic, with paper plates, and we all eat dinner together.

One of the kids said he heard last year about Billy and the Pen, because all the parents were talking about him. That's because, last year, Billy escaped. It was in the Omaha World Herald newspaper, and on the television set news. I wasn't in school yet, but my adopted older brother and sister were, and they came home crying because everyone at school teased them about it. I said, they should tease them back. All those people in the State Pen, and Billy was the only one smart enough to escape!

But my adopted Dad said that wasn't smart, just another sign of how stupid Billy was, so stupid he got caught in a couple of days, trying to hold up a Dairy Queen. Now Billy is going to be in the Pen quite a while more, now, just because he escaped.

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