

Super Sunday  
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It is early February 2004, and it is the majority of America's favorite weekend. I am not part of this majority, as I am more partial to baseball than football. However, I love it just the same. Super Bowl Sunday has always been a tradition in my family. My aunt D, as we call her, hosts a viewing party for our intermediate family at her house. There is always plenty of food and leftovers.

This Super Bowl Sunday starts like any other. The rest of my intermediate family brings over their delectables and Aunt D starts the grill. Hamburgers and hot dogs are the main course for these events, the cornerstone of any nutritious Sunday evening festivity. My other aunt, Aunt T, brings macaroni salad, and my grandmother brings her scrumptious cornbread casserole. My grandfather, his political rants, my uncle brings his ears, and we children, our empty stomachs. I am fourteen years old, and if there is one thing I have learned by this time, it is that you better be hungry enough to enjoy everyone's cooking. Coming to a family cook off even partially full on bread is a great enough offense to damn myself to the nephew/grandson purgatory. This mortifying place consists of dagger-like glances and one-sentence conversations. It can make any day not so super. I learned early on to eat what I am given at these events with a smile, and finish off the entire dish to assure the cook I had enjoyed it. Luckily, that is not hard to do on this Sunday, as the supply of "creative" casseroles is at a minimum.

While the adults are preparing the food and disagreeing on politics, my brother, my cousins, and I are outside on the street, throwing a football around. There will be nothing worthwhile on the TV until kickoff, as the seemingly infinite lineup of pre-game shows gets nauseating after about the second hour. My two youngest cousins are enjoying this little break. Aunt T is strict on them, if not sheltering. She is also quite overzealous about her kids' extracurricular activities. They are signed up for more clubs and sports in this semester than I have been involved in through my entire life. They might consider me lazy, but I consider them hyperactive and excessive. Whether or not my two cousins thoroughly enjoy all this responsibility thrust upon them, I do not know.

I miss an easy pass of the football from my oldest cousin and blame it on it getting dark. It is about feeding time. After we are yelled at by our superiors to come inside, otherwise known as the dinner bell, we gather around the smorgasbord that is presented in front of us. My grandfather asks if we are "going to do that blessing thing," and the youngest cousin leads us in prayer. Afterward, my grandfather begins bickering about something having to do with the amount of salt in my grandmother's cornbread casserole. "It's ruined," says my grandfather. "Oh, shut up Jack," my grandmother demands sincerely but in a tongue-n-cheek manner. She winks and gives a slight smirk to everyone else in the room. My grandmother always seems to confront situations in an amalgamation of seriousness and playfulness.

During the meal, the game kicks off. Now our attention is divided three ways: between our food, each other, and the television. Some argument between the split parties of our family about President Bush gets lost in the shuffle, as whooping and hollering at the tube ensues. No one really cares about who wins, we all just are interested in a good game. We are all brought together for this one, three-hour event, despite our differences.

After dinner, being full of ground beef and queso dip, we all head up stairs into the den to watch the big game properly. Of all the debates between my family over the years, there is one thing we've always agreed on: football is meant to be spectated on sofa chairs in front of a big

screen television. The game continues, and it is an exciting one. The arc of our reaction and conversation charts like a roller coaster with every play.

As much as we enjoy the game, the commercials are also a huge point of interest. There are some funny ones this year, and as always, they seem to incorporate animals. I figure that must be a rule of good humor. When in doubt, find an animal. Dogs are always fan favorites, especially dogs in beer commercials. “I wonder if canines are not running Anheuser-Busch themselves,” my grandmother says with that same half smirk she showed in the dining room. “What kind of interest would a dog have in a beer company?” my grandfather coaxes, playing along. “That’s anyone’s guess,” she responds. She looks directly at my grandfather, “but I bet it has something to do how much they sleep and lie around all the time.” Everyone finds this amusing to varying degrees.

Now, it is time for another point of interest; the half-time show. I do not think anyone in my family is actually a fan of most of the musical acts that perform during the Super Bowl, but the half-time spectacle is always worthy of some attention. This year the guest performing is a 90’s replica, Janet Jackson. The stadium lights dim and some fine pyrotechnics light up the center stage. Familiar music starts playing and Janet Jackson descends from a lift into the middle of a group of dancers, and the pageantry begins. In a surprise appearance, Justin Timberlake joins Janet and proceeds to rip away a rather large piece of my innocence in one split-second.

There is a shockwave sent from the building, through the television, and into our reality. The once jovial household is now a derelict ship floating somewhere in space. “Oh, God!” my grandmother yells after she realizes what happened. Aunt T looks at my younger cousins to see if they had seen it, looking at them while simultaneously looking up to God and praying she does not have to explain to her seven and nine year old what part of the female anatomy Justin just uncovered for them. My uncle is looking at my aunt as if asking her telepathically what to do. My older cousin and my brother are laughing. I’m avoiding eye contact. My grandfather is asleep. I can feel all their hot stares upon me, although in reality I’m probably just imagining this. I know their thoughts, however. They could give me an explanation, but they know it is unnecessary. They know that by now I could explain it to them. Being a fourteen-year old isn’t easy anymore, it seems, even on Super Bowl Sunday.

I think that is the day my childhood ended. The day I realized my parents (or other family members) knew I had become self-aware was a defining moment in my life. I never forgot that image, and I don’t think America has either. They have since dubbed the incident (unoriginally, I might add) “nipplegate” and censors have since been maximized, especially during live events such as the Super Bowl. Watching TV now is kind of like going to the airport. For me, it seemed to have the opposite effect. No longer was I inspected and x-rayed to make sure that nothing dirty got through. Still, the moment of liberation was so startling and sudden that it could not have resisted being awkward and unsettling. And for that one unenviable moment alone, I will never forgive Justin Timberlake.