

UNDERSTANDING KEN

In this excerpt, our ten-year-old hero is traveling across the border with his hockey team to play in the United States of America, where everything is (or was in 1973) bigger, better and bolder...

The Pee Wee Rep team took a bus to Spokane in the United States of America. It takes about three hours to get down there. Except for Hockey Night in Canada and the Bugs Bunny/Roadrunner Hour, the United States of America is where all the good TV comes from. You go over the border and then you get to Colville and things start to get a little bigger and a little brighter. A long time ago I bought a GI Joe there with Kung Fu grip. You couldn't even get Kung Fu grip in Canada.

By the time you get to Spokane you really know you're not in Canada. Kmart is as big as a hockey arena and they've got this announcer there just as loud as the announcer guy at the Montreal Forum and he's telling you what to buy. On the street you can't even see the front end of some of the cars there. That's how long they are. We saw a car with horns on the front end. It looked like a bull.

They've got a sign at one of their restaurants. It's about a mile hour. It's the giant boy with big overalls holding up a hamburger with a big patty and big lettuce and big cheese and big ketchup, and I think onions, too. I'm not sure about the onions. They just call it Big Boy restaurant. It's a perfect name. It makes me think of the big boy on our team but this big boy is as tall as the smokestacks up on the hill in Trail.

We ate lunch at an Arby's roast-beef sandwich place and it was pretty

good. Women in the United States of America have the biggest bums in the world. Especially at Arby's. You can't believe it. Guys have big guts down there, but the women's bums are bigger. As wide as the bus we drove down in and in bright colours--pink, green, dark blue, pale blue, red, orange, yellow. Those bums are just like two giant balloons squished together. I haven't seen one but they'd have to have special toilets for those bums. I'd bet on it.

When I see bums like that I feel just like I do when someone gets a brush cut. You just want to go feel it but you never do. Sometimes you do with a brush cut. There was a family who got brush cuts in school last year because of lice. Even the sisters. I actually felt one of their heads. But with these bums you can only wonder.

After the game we all got billeted out and my billet was the big boy of their team--not as big as our assistant captain big boy, but big enough to know he could go mental and skate straight into the boards for no reason and you just might be in the way. He had black glasses and he breathed through his nose all the time like he was snoring but he was wide awake. I think, like our big boy, his brain is too small for his head. It's not his fault. That's how big boys are.

My billet's mom was super-big, too, and super-nice. I couldn't stop staring at her. It was pretty cool. Arms as big as my mom's thighs and thighs as big as those hoops that dolphins jump through at the aquarium. I'm not kidding. And she had one of those Arby's roast-beef sandwich bums, too. You don't find bums like that in Canada. You can look but you just don't.

In their big house they had big food in a big kitchen with big Cokes. For dinner we had brontosaurus steaks and bright yellow corn on the cob as big as a rolling pin and mountains of mashed potatoes with golden butter and thick gravy flowing everywhere. For dessert we had chocolate pudding with whip cream and angel food cake with ice cream. Then we all went into

their big front room and my billet's mom sat her big bum on the big couch and we all watched a big TV.

I bet if I ate two thousand Arby's roast beef sandwiches I still wouldn't get a bum like that. How could I? I don't have enough skin.

That night, me and her son slept in bunk beds and I was on the top bunk and I felt my ribs and my pigeon chest. I was wondering what it must be like to lie in bed and be that big. That's when the bedroom door opened. It was the big boy's mom.

She said, "Are my little men okay? Do you need a snack?"

I was so full I could barely talk. I said no but thanks for having me over.

Her son said yes and she brought him a bowl of Count Chocula cereal in bed! Count Chocula! At my dad's we don't even eat breakfast or we might have pancakes. At my mom's you get granola or a grapefruit and hopefully just enough brown sugar to kill the taste. It's not like that in the United States of America. In the United States of America you get Count Chocula in bed!

I woke up in the night. I had to find out about how big their toilets were. I snuck upstairs and pushed open one door. It was the dad's office. It had a big oak desk and there was a big moose head on the wall looking right at me. I jumped about forty feet.

The next door was a bathroom. I don't know if it was the bathroom the mom used, but the toilet was just the same as ours at home. About the size of a basketball hoop. The seat had a pink plastic cover. It was padded. Not much. I tried it out. That's when my eyes bulged. Hanging from the shower curtain rod was the biggest pair of underwear in the history of the world. Like a giant white flag. The elastic was wider than hockey tape. That elastic could slingshot you and a buddy all the way back across the border to Canada. I could feel my heart beating like crazy but I stood up and touched

them. I had to. They felt just like normal underwear but I felt all funny.

Then I sniffed 'em.

I don't know why. I just did.

They didn't smell like anything either, but I felt even more funny.