

OUR CAPITOL ADVENTURE. 1977.

- When will we be there?

Our three and a half year old was in a buggy and his little brother was in a carrier on his dad's shoulders.

We'd decided to take a tour of the Capitol building in Washington. It was a hot day and there was a very long queue.

One kid was crying and the other was moaning.

- When will we be there?

It was just like being on a car journey. We often had this lament when we had only gone as far as Watford Junction.

We were finally reaching the end of the queue.

At the top of the stairs there were a few scary looking cops with guns.

At the barrier there was a metal detector.

I nodded towards it.

- Our knife's going to set that off. We'd better declare it.

The cop recoiled when we showed him the knife.

- You have a knife.

- Yes. It's for the kids' fruit.

- It's a felony to have a knife on federal property.

I pointed to the lockers behind him where they were putting people's belongings.

- It can go in the locker, I said.

- It can't. You'll have to leave.

Our kids starting crying again, letting out a howl that must have been heard by all the congressmen inside.

- We've been waiting in line for over an hour, I said. We are here for the tour. Our children are with us, I said, pointing out the two howling kids in case he hadn't noticed them.

- You'll have to leave, he repeated. Alternatively, he offered, we could take the knife outside and bury it on the perimeter and collect it afterwards.

We thought he was joking. But, no.

- If we did that, I ventured, we could skip the line right? We wouldn't have to line up all over again?

- You would have to line up again, we were told.

So we left. Back down the stairs, past all the waiting people fuming because we had held up the queue. Down we went and out into the fresh air.

But we were not alone. We were accompanied by two cops with guns who escorted us, not just to the end of the line but right off the premises.

Walking back in the direction of the White House we spotted a helicopter heading for its garden. Something made us think it might be the President returning from a trip. We started to run - not an easy thing to do in the heat while carrying bags and pushing a buggy and with a kid in a back pack. But run we did.

We reached the White House fence just in time to see the helicopter land and President Carter step out. This wasn't long after his inauguration so it was something to see him. Even the children, who had stopped crying by now, caught our excitement.

But it was ice cream, not the President, which saved the day.



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