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## Inspection

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## Inspection

*Alicia DeFonzo*

“This is an inspection,” my father ordered as I stepped off the bus. A spot-check for food particles. I opened my mouth wide.

Dad directed me to brush my teeth after lunch period. But this was third grade, and other kids taunted after I was spotted with a neon pink travel toothbrush and foaming mouth.

Fact was, I hadn’t brushed and lied. He didn’t buy it.

“Well, we’ll just clean your teeth right now.”

Strolling to the back yard, sunbeams played hide and go seek through the clouds. Dad held my hand, and we bent to the ground to gently cup a fistful of dirt as if a lightning bug. Then, his hand guided mine towards my mouth, pushing the dirt beyond my second set of teeth. He placed the toothbrush in the other hand.

“Now brush.”

My wrist forced the bristles back and forth. I tried not to swallow, keep the dry clumps in the gums, but saliva and quick tears made mud of the earth. Soon, some bits slowly slipped past my tongue, and I choked, coughing out the sodden soil.

He leaned two inches from my face and whispered: “Do you have your mind right now?” The reply was always the same, “Sir, yes, sir!”

“Then, keep it right,” the Master Sergeant said and kicked me once in the behind for good measure. I ran off and hid in my bedroom closet until dinner.

There were times I wished he would stop breathing.

The next day, Dad acted as if nothing had occurred, like he always did, and I followed suit, head and eyes to the floor.



**About the Author:** Alicia DeFonzo is a Lecturer of English at Old Dominion University in Virginia where she teaches post-apocalyptic literature, rhetoric and animal welfare, and banned books. She also leads an annual study abroad program to London on the subject of Harry Potter. DeFonzo is working on her first nonfiction narrative, uncovering truths about her grandfather's life as a WWII combat engineer. A chapter excerpt, "The Camps," was recently published in *The Montreal Review*. Additionally, she received her MFA in Non-Fiction under Blake Bailey, an MA in Literature, and was awarded the 2014 Gettysburg Review Conference Award in Non-Fiction.