

## ANDA DUBINSKIS

*Where I Was*, 2007  
Gouache, 29 x 19 in



## UMBERTO TOSI

# Didn't You Used to Be DawDaw?

—To my dear and wonderful daughter  
Alicia Sammons, globe-trotting former  
denizen of Ventura, California,  
and keen cultural observer.

Henry took a melon from the refrigerator and held it out like Hamlet remembering Yorick. He made an unlikely prince—hawk-nosed, beady eyed, and Dumbo eared. Better cast as Yorick, if the jester's skull had been a speaking part.

“Alas! We *cant-aloupe*, honey! Your *mooder* already mailed *dem* announcements!” He did the crackly, singsong, incongruous Swede voice that anyone who grew up in the 1980s or 90s would recognize as that of DawDaw McGee, the absentminded clown in yellow overalls who got kicked by a Hortense the Cow every morning on *Uncle Jerry's Phun Farm*. Henry had played scores of different side characters in mostly forgettable movies since then, but people watching would still ask: “Hey, didn't that guy used to be DawDaw?” There was no escaping kiddie-TV hoosegow for Henry, and his doing DawDaw knockoffs in occasional commercials (deftly skirting Uncle Jerry's ownership of the character) didn't help.

His stepdaughter, Elana, still called him DawDaw, even though she wasn't even born when the show was on and had only seen blurry YouTube clips of it. Elana smirked as she breezed into the kitchen from the backyard, solid, tall, and barefoot in black halter top and shorts, her choppy-cut, curled coppery-auburn hair (inherited from her mother) still damp from running the garden hose. Almost Halloween and only midmorning and it felt like a hundred out there.

“Gawd, DawDaw,” Elana mouthed in mock, old-movie-channel, society-dame contralto, grabbing her mobile phone off the counter where it had been charging. “Jesus told that joke in the third grade.” She was forever doing voices. She had to speak up. The *thud-thud-thudding* of a water-bucket-porting helicopter passing low overhead en route to the fire lines nearly drowned her out.

“That's where *he got* the joke, honey,” said her mother, Daisy, sitting at the kitchen counter opposite Henry. (Technically, Daisy and Henry were exes with papers from a bombastic divorce ten years earlier to prove it. Later they had reunited, but never made it official.)

“DawDaw sat right behind Jesus. He used to copy his answers,” Daisy added, with a half-suppressed giggle. Henry didn't need to be clever to elicit nervous laughs. He clung to punch lines like a drowning man trying to reel himself out trouble. People laughed at him and felt a little guilty