

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *Family and Friends*, Book 5 of the *Discovering the Real Me* series. We hope you will enjoy this book. It is full of stories about the classmates, neighborhood friends, and relatives of fictional characters just about your age.

We think some of the stories will sound like experiences you or your friends have had in real life; others will expose you to people and situations you are not familiar with. You can learn something from both the stories that seem familiar, and those that are about people in different situations than yours.

You are just at an age when you are beginning to understand other people's points of view. This is a very important understanding if you are to get along well with family and friends. Getting along well with friends is probably becoming more and more important to you at this stage of your life. This book will show you different students' points of view and how they go about their lives. You can decide how successful you think they are at making good relationships with friends, family, and others.

You are also at an age when you have a strong personal sense of right and wrong—and sometimes you have to stand up to your friends and others in order to be true to yourself. This isn't easy. It may make you feel like you aren't strong enough—or good enough—at times. But you are. You are a valuable person who knows how to do the right thing. Hopefully, this book will encourage you in understanding that.

Because people your age are very talented physically, you will be reading about sports stars, competitors, daredevils, and people developing their computer skills. As they conquer these physical frontiers, very often these boys and girls have to conquer mental and emotional frontiers, too. They have to learn to accept defeat well, to learn from their mistakes, to learn the difference between courage and taking foolish chances, to learn not to offend others by bragging about their accomplishments, and to learn to have the courage to try new skills.

We hope you will enjoy the time you spend with these young people, and that their experiences can help you and instruct you in getting along with friends and family.

Chapter 1: I Am Valuable

Even though I stand taller than all of the girls and boys in my class and some call me “lanky” or think that I must play basketball because I am so tall, I still love me. Even though I am skinny and not a straight A student, and I don’t wear fancy name brand clothes, I still love me. Even though I may not bring “special” lunches to school with syrupy, sweet contents because my parents care about my health, and other students say I eat rabbit food, I still love me. I think I’m worth a lot.

My name is Kenyatta Tucker, and I am a “Trini”, which means I am from Trinidad and Tobago. I am a fifth grade student, and I absolutely love science. My best friend’s name is Jeffrey Redman, and he is in my class, which is taught by the best teacher in the whole world, Mrs. Miller. Mrs. Miller teaches us that no matter how you look or dress you should always love yourself. She teaches us that it is what is on the inside of you, not the outside of you, that counts.

I wish I could tell that to Kayla and Jessica, who are the school bullies and talk about everyone. They make students feel like running and hiding when they see them walking down the hallways. But not me. I have self-confidence, and I can handle whatever they want to dish out.

“Look at Kenyatta over there, looking like she plays basketball for the NBA,” said Kayla.

Jeffrey said, “Just ignore them. They just hate it that they can’t get to you, Kenyatta.”

I responded, “Yeah, they don’t bother me.” I continued, “I just look at them and laugh to myself because they obviously don’t like themselves, which is why they are always picking on other people.” I also said, “They must need a hug—that is why they are always screaming for attention.”

A few of the students in the hallways just laughed at my response to the bullies’ ridicule. Kayla said, “If I needed a hug, it surely wouldn’t come from a skinny beanpole like you, Kenyatta.”

Jessica echoed, “Yeah!”



I didn't have time to continue the verbal exchange because I did not want to be late for Mrs. Miller's class. Jeffrey and I hurried downstairs to our class to get our two favorite seats right in the front row. As the attendance was being called, Kayla and Jessica made their way into the classroom and found their usual seats in the back row by the door. I sat in my seat and anxiously waited what topic Mrs. Miller would talk about today. I liked all the things Mrs. Miller taught us about life, like that we should love ourselves no matter where we lived, what kind of car we drove, or what name brands of clothes we wore. I personally knew I didn't need the approval of my peers to "fit in". I love me just the way I am.

Mrs. Miller asked, "Who is almost finished with their science fair projects, because we have less than three weeks before they are due."

Most of the students responded that they hadn't even started their projects yet, and others said they hadn't even picked a topic yet.

I proudly said, "Mrs. Miller my project is almost complete."

Mrs. Miller responded, "Good job, Kenyatta. You are always ahead of the game."

My experiment had to do with which soil grew plants the fastest.

Jessica heckled me from the back row by saying, "I bet Kenyatta will be doing her experiment on what foods giraffes like to eat."

The entire class started to laugh, except for my friend, Jeffrey, and Mrs. Miller. Instead of playing the verbal exchange game with Jessica, I flipped everything around by offering her my assistance in finishing her science project. Everyone got real quiet. Then, to my surprise, Jessica accepted my offer to help, and Mrs. Miller nodded her approval.

I could see Kayla in the corner of my eye, fuming because Jessica decided to work with me. I always received As in science, so Jessica knew I was a worthy candidate to assist her.

I ended up helping Jessica receive a B+ on her science project, which is the highest grade she has ever received in science. She normally gets a D or a D—barely passing.

As we worked together, Jessica and I realized we had a lot in common—like music and favorite television shows. So after the project was complete, we continued to spend time together. We got together on the weekends and talked on the phone almost three times a week. Kayla, of course, felt I was taking her friend from her, but Jessica realized it was more fun to *have* fun than to *make* fun of other people.



Jessica shared with me that people used to pick on her and Kayla, which is why they started talking about other people—to avoid being picked on.

I said, “Two wrongs don’t make a right. You should treat people the way you would like to be treated.”

Jessica said, “How can you be so nice to me, when I have been so mean to you?”

I responded, “Mrs. Miller teaches us to let go of the negative and embrace the positive.”

Jessica said, “I like that. I will have to use it on Kayla.” We laughed.

Jessica admitted that, thanks to our new friendship, she had a lot more self-confidence.

"It feels good to be friends *for* something instead of just *against* other people."

"We need to help Kayla learn that," I said. "She'll have a lot more fun."

Questions

1. Kayla and Jessica are "girl bullies" in the beginning of the story. That means they use the way they talk to and about people to bully them. Are there any "girl bullies" in your school? What do you do about them?

2. What do you think is the best way to handle girl bullies?

3. What do you think is the best way to handle boy bullies? (Boy bullies use force and threats to bully other students.)

4. Do you think bullies, boys or girls, are not getting enough attention and love?

5. Do you have any teachers who, like Mrs. Miller, teach you about life as well as the subjects in school?

6. What's the best thing about life a teacher has ever taught you?

7. List five things you like about yourself.

8. Name five things you are good at.

9. Write, "I am talented, valuable, and lovable" five times.

Exercise

Circle the five best things you think a bully can do to stop him- or herself. Then circle the five best things you think a victim can do to make a bully stop bullying him or her.

(These suggestions are from the book *Bullies and Victims* by SuEllen Fried and Paula Fried, published by M. Evans and Company, Inc., New York, 1996, pgs. 111-112.)

What can a bully do?

Learn how to handle your anger.

Ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?"

Get help to feel better about yourself.

Try to stop picking on someone for just one day.

Listen to a friend.

Talk to another bully and discuss your behavior.

Form a "Bullies Anonymous" [self-help] group.

Experience some consequences.

Recognize what you are doing.

Work really hard to control your behavior.

Think about how you would feel if you were the victim.

Try to get attention by doing something good.

What can a victim do?

Ignore the bully.

Walk away.

Use humor.

Think about good things.

Talk to a friend.

Tell an adult.

Stand up for yourself.

Get involved in some activities that make you feel good.

Threaten a bully who might back off from strength.

Use "I" messages. ["When you bully me, *I* feel really hurt and mad. *I* need you to stop it."

Involve a peer mediator [someone your own age who can help you understand each other].

Take karate lessons.

Fight back as a last resort.

Share your feelings.

Try to make a friend of the bully.

Go to another school.

Give the bully a compliment.

Give the bully a hug.

Chapter 2: Doing The Right Thing

It was a typical day in my neighborhood in the Chinatown area of San Francisco, California. My name is Twang Lo, and I am in the fifth grade. My favorite subject in school is social studies, because I get the opportunity to learn about other customs, races, and cultures. I come from a very traditional Chinese family where we lived, shopped, and went to school within two miles of our home. Most of my friends were Chinese, except for the few non-Chinese students that attended my neighborhood school, named Telegraph Road Elementary School.



My father is an electrical engineer for a large IT firm in San Francisco, and my mother is a foreign language teacher at Glendale High School, just about ten miles from our home. We live in a house in the hills, and our neighborhood has a farmers' market with the most fresh fruits and vegetables that I have ever tasted. As a matter of fact, the owner of the farmers' market name is Mr. Chang, and he would often tell me and my best friend, Alger, that people would travel over an hour just to get his fresh produce.

Alger and I walked by Mr. Chang's market everyday on our way to and from school, and when we were heading back from playing soccer at the park. My friend Alger was a good kid, but he loved stealing fruit from Mr. Chang's market every opportunity he got.

Alger would say, "He won't miss it. I bet he has over a million dollars. A piece of fruit won't hurt his pockets."

I felt guilty walking past the market even when I was by myself, because I knew Mr. Chang was sure one of us was taking his fruit.

Alger and I were on our way to park, where we often go. We were approaching the market when Alger said, "Hey, Twang. Watch me take one of those nectarines from old Mr. Chang."

I responded, "Alger, Mr. Chang knows one of us is stealing his fruit, and I don't want him to think it is me."

Alger just said, "Who cares? Think for a minute, Twang. If he really believed that, he would have called the police by now. I have been taking his fruit for over a year."

I just shook my head in disgust.

I said, “I don’t want people to think I am a thief. Everyone knows each other in my neighborhood, and I don’t want any of this to get back to my parents.”

One day, out of the blue, Mr. Chang did something unusual. He ran out from behind the cash register and grabbed me and Alger by the arms just after Alger had stolen a plum.

Mr. Chang said, “Now which one of you has been stealing my fruit? Every time you steal my fruit, it means I have to charge your parents more money for their produce, which is something I don’t like to do. Thanks to you kids, I have no choice but to raise my prices to make up for what is stolen.”



After hearing Mr. Chang put it that way, I think even Alger felt guilty deep down inside, but he did not want to admit he was the thief. Instead, he wanted me to take the blame, because his dad would “kill” him. He pointed his finger at me.

Mr. Chang responded, “Is it true, Twang, that you are the one who has been stealing my fruit? Aren’t you Mr. Lo’s son?”

I replied, “Yes, I am Mr. Lo’s son, and Mr. Chang, I did not steal your fruit. As a matter of fact, my friend Alger here has been stealing fruit from you for over a year.”

Once I got started telling the truth and doing the right thing, I had to tell it all. I knew that this might cost me a friend, but if Alger were truly my friend, he would not steal and, on top of that, blame me for his crime. Since Alger had the plum in his pocket and because of my sincere words, Mr. Chang now knew who the thief was.

Instead of Mr. Chang calling the police, he decided to settle things himself. He told Alger he would not press charges if Alger promised to sweep up the farmers' market every day after school for two hours for the next two weeks. Alger agreed.

After the two weeks were up, Alger ended up getting a part time job at Mr. Chang’s farmers' market after school. He not only enjoyed working with Mr. Chang, he enjoyed

making his own money and being responsible. (He spent some of his money buying fruit!)

In the end, Alger was glad I had done the right thing in telling the truth about him. He had learned a valuable lesson about taking responsibility for his own actions.

Questions

1. Do you always make the “right” choice?

2. Do you believe it is important to always do the right thing?

3. Is there such a thing as a “little” lie or half-truth?

4. Is it okay to keep a secret if it will hurt your friend (not telling an adult about a friend's stealing or cheating, for instance)?

5. Is it ever okay to cheat on a test or assignment, even if you are cheating off your best friend and he or she says it's okay?

6. Do you think Twang Lo should have told on Alger much sooner?

7. Do you think Alger was a bad kid who should have gone to jail?

8. Was Mr. Chang a kind man? Did he help Alger be a better person?

Exercise

Pretend you are Alger in the story, but things are a little different. Mr. Chang believed you that your friend Twang Lo was the fruit thief, and he called the police. Twang Lo was taken down to the police station and his parents were telephoned. You couldn't sleep all night thinking about what happened. You decide you have to do the right thing. What is the right thing to do?

Chapter 3: Don't Let Pride Stand in Your Way

I knew Robert was the brightest student in Language Arts class. That didn't mean I had to like it, did it? Or go so far as to ask him for help? No, I had too much pride for that.

Mr. Findle, the Language Arts teacher, told me to ask Robert for help in the class, because Robert aced every test and got an A+ on every essay. What was Robert's secret, I wondered. Did he eat a special breakfast the day of a big test? Did he wear a certain lucky shirt?

Because I did not like to read, I had been really struggling in Mr. Findle's class.

"Tommy, why don't you work with Robert on your summary of the story we read in class yesterday?" Mr. Findle would suggest.

"No thanks, Mr. Findle. I think I can handle this assignment on my own," I said. I hated it when Mr. Findle would ask people who were struggling in his class to seek the assistance of teacher's pet, Robert. Plus, I didn't want to acknowledge that Robert was "bright".

One day, Mr. Findle announced, "Class, we will be writing a play of your choice, but I want you to work in pairs. I have already picked the pairs. Tommy, I would like you to work with Robert," said Mr. Findle.

I wasn't surprised. This was just Mr. Findle's way of putting Robert and me together so Robert could "help" me. I thought, "Man, what a way for Mr. Findle to embarrass me. He knows I like working alone."

Mr. Findle continued, "Class, I would like you to write a modern version of *The Wizard of Oz*—even more modern than the 1970s version *The Wiz*. I want your four main characters to all be in need of help with one of their issues (i.e., brains, heart, courage, etc.)

I would have rather gotten an F on the assignment than accept the help of that Know-It-All, Robert. Still, I needed to raise my grade so my parents would get off my back. I sucked up my pride and told Robert I was ready to work with him.



We came up with some great ideas. It was fun working as a team. Robert wasn't so bad after all; in fact, he had a terrific sense of humor. I learned that he didn't do any magic, nor was he "lucky", but he gave every assignment his best. When I saw how hard he worked, I knew he deserved the grades he got. He gave up a lot of things to study better, too.

I thought people only asked questions if they were dumb, but I saw that Robert learned by asking questions of Mr. Findle. I learned not to let my pride stand in my way by working with Robert, by asking questions when I didn't understand things and by looking things up instead of just guessing or assuming I knew.

I ended up getting an A+ on the play that I worked on with Robert, and Mr. Findle absolutely loved it. The last I heard, Mr. Findle was trying to get the drama department to do a reenactment of our production. And guess what? Now Robert and I are friends!



Questions

1. Have you ever let your pride stand in your way to being successful?

2. What is the definition of pride? (Look it up in the dictionary.)

3. Mr. Findle created a situation where Tommy had to swallow his pride and work with Robert as a partner. Do you think this was wise?

4. Was it better to do it this way—making them partners—than to keep urging Tommy to ask for Robert's help?

5. Maybe Tommy thought Robert would "lord it over" him if he asked him for his help. Has this kind of fear ever stopped you from asking someone for help when you needed it?

6. What did Tommy learn about Robert's personality?

7. What did Tommy learn about doing better in school?

Exercise

There's a good kind of pride and a bad kind of pride. Good pride means that you are happy about an accomplishment, a job well done, the efforts of those you love, or the good things you stand for. Bad pride means that you can't admit that you need help in some things, that you make mistakes that you need to be sorry for, and that you can learn from others sometimes.

Make a list of at least five things you can have good pride about and describe why you are proud of them. Some examples might be good grades, the accomplishments or character of your parents, family, your country, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Chapter 4: You Can't Always Get What You Want

The Little League World Series was being held in my hometown of Puerto Villarta, Mexico. I was excited because my team, called the Los Toros Braves, was to compete in the tournament. It was the biggest game of my life.

My dad promised me he wouldn't miss this game, because he missed many of my other games and practices due to his job and having to travel a lot. My father was a computer salesman, and he was often on the go or out of town due to his large client base. He had promised me, though, and you know that when parents promise, they are supposed to keep that promise.

My team worked hard to make it to the tournament. We had to beat three of the best teams in our area. One of the teams we beat won the World Series last year, so we had lots of hopes of winning this year.

My baseball coach announced, "Team, in order for us to get ready for the tournament, we are going to practice twice a day for the next two weeks."



The team didn't mind. We wanted to win, and we were willing to do anything it took to do so. My mom often took me to practice since my dad was often out of town. I hated that my dad missed my practices, because I would look out and see all of the other fathers there at practice with their sons, and then there was me with my mom. I wished my father would think of me more than that stupid job of his. I know my father has to provide a living for my mom and me, but I wish he had a little bit more time with me.

I played shortstop because I had a quick hand. My coach would say I was one of the fastest shortstops he had seen on the field, and that was something, because my coach had a quick eye. I knew that was thanks to my dad, because he was a former shortstop, and he taught me everything he knew.

He would tell me, "Son, keep your eye on the ball or the runner's feet."

I loved playing shortstop because while everyone thinks the pitcher or the catcher are the most important positions, the shortstop is the one who makes the plays happen. I would often compare myself to the best shortstops in the league. Besides my dad, they were my heroes.

The day before the Little League World Series, my stomach was doing flips. I was excited and nervous. I was nervous because I was wondering if my father was actually going to be there.

I asked my mom, “Will dad really be at my game tomorrow? I overheard him on the phone with one of his business partners, and it sounded like there is a trip planned that dad has to go to in the morning. Dad did try to get out of it, but it didn't sound like he was going to.”

My mom replied, “Now, Juan, you know your father would not intentionally miss your game. You admitted yourself you heard him trying to get out of his business trip.”

I replied, “I know, Mom. After all, he promised.”

There was a big parade held in our honor the morning before the game. The parade was fun, and a lot of my classmates were out in the crowd waving to me. It was also good to see my dad in the crowd waving at me. Unfortunately, I felt doubt in the back of my mind whether my dad would make it to the game or not. Right before the game, my dad gave me a special glove and new shoes. I felt like a million dollars.



After the parade, we came home and ate a victory lunch with my mom and dad, aunts, uncles, my grandparents, three of my classmates, and two teammates.

My dad pulled me to the side and said, “Juan, I am sorry to tell you this but I have to leave shortly to go out of town on business.”

I responded, “But, Dad, you promised.”

“Son, I hate to leave, and I asked if I could push the meeting back until later, but the client is only in town for a short time,” my dad said.

I told him I understood, and that I would tell him all about it once he got back. I was holding back tears of disappointment. My dad gave me a kiss on the head and a hug and wished me luck in the tournament.

It was the best game of my life. My team ended up coming in second place, but we beat two other teams that were far better than we were last year, so we were thoroughly satisfied that we were getting better and better. I couldn’t wait to tell my father the good news about how our team did, and how I received the Most Valuable Player trophy for the last game.

I wasn’t mad at my dad anymore. I understood that this was his job, and he had to go where the job sent him. I know he tried to make it to my game and wanted to go to it. The lesson I learned is you can’t always have things your way all of the time. You have to be willing to compromise every now and then.

When my dad came home, I told him all about the game and how we played and how we only lost the last game by one run.

My dad said, “You guys will win next year.”

I replied, “Thanks, Dad. I’m not mad at you for having to do your job.”

My dad looked deep in my eyes and said, “Son, I hated to disappoint you. I will try not to miss any other big games. I can’t promise I won’t miss some, but I will always try my best not to.”

I told him, “Dad, I appreciate you for providing for our family. Please forgive me for not understanding.”

We ended up hugging each other so tightly I don’t know if either one of us could breathe!

Then we both laughed.

Questions

1. Have you ever been disappointed by something or someone? What was it?

2. How did you get over your disappointment?

3. Sometimes we think our clothes, food, shelter, and transportation come to us as gifts. They are gifts—from our parents, who have to work hard to earn them. What do your parents do for work?

4. Does your parents' work ever take them away from spending time with you or attending special events of yours? How do you feel when this happens?

5. Have your parents ever had to break a promise they made to you?

6. Were you able to forgive them?

7. Are you thankful for all your parents do for you? What things specifically are you grateful for?

Exercise

Circle the best response in each situation where you can't get what you want:

1. Your friend's parents said you could come with them to the big soccer match, along with your friend. They are going to pay for tickets and snacks. You and your friend are super excited! The morning of the match, it is pouring rain. Your friend calls to say her parents think the game will be cancelled, and they are not going to make the trip. You say:
 - a. "Wow, that's disappointing. Well, no one can help the weather. It happens. Want to get together to play anyway—my mom said you could come over here."
 - b. "I don't think they'll cancel the game. It's too important! Ask your mom and dad if we can at least try and go there. Maybe it'll stop raining by then!"
 - c. "Your parents are really mean."
2. Jessica promised to be your best friend forever. Now she's getting to be good friends with Mary. You say:
 - a. "I don't see what you see in Mary. She's stupid and ugly."
 - b. "Don't ever speak to me again."
 - c. "You're spending a lot of time with Mary these days. Sometimes I feel left out. Are we still as good friends as we were?"
3. Your mother promised to take you shopping, and then she got a bad headache and had to lie down. You say:
 - a. "Can't you just take an aspirin and take me shopping anyway?"
 - b. "Something like this always happens. I'm sick and tired of it."
 - c. "Don't worry about me, Mom. Just rest. We can go another day when you feel better."

Chapter 5: A True Friend

My name is Donna. This story is about two girls from totally different worlds. The only thing they had in common was ME.

One girl was named Melissa. She was the leader of the fashion club at school. Melissa's favorite color was pink, and she loved very "girlie" things like playing with hairdos and shopping. Melissa had tons of clothes, almost all name brand. Her parents would get her anything she wanted because she was the only child in the family.

On the other hand, there was Veronica. Veronica was a straight A student and the captain of the debate team. Veronica really didn't care much about fashion. She was one of four other siblings, among whom she was the oldest. Therefore, she had a lot of responsibility in her family, and they couldn't afford to get her all the latest clothes. She absolutely loved the debate team and would debate any topic just to keep in practice.

Me—I am on the debate team and very good friends with Veronica. But I am in the "fashion club" too, so I was friends with Melissa as well.



Some people tell me the only reason I was in the fashion club was because I came from a "well-to-do" family, which went with the "image". Many other girls at my school stated that I wasn't really "cool" enough to be in the fashion club. But Melissa seemed to think I was, so I hung on to her good opinion of me.

I couldn't understand why Melissa and Veronica didn't get along. It seemed like they were always using the other one's name as an example of what they didn't want to be like. It was hard on me, because I was friends with both of them.

After debate team practice, Veronica said, "Why are you in that stupid fashion club, anyway? Honestly, you don't seem like you even like fashion that much. And how can you stand to be around that uppity Melissa?"

I responded, "My mother wanted to be a fashion designer when she was young. It would break her heart if I quit the fashion club." My mom had been more excited about me joining the fashion club than I was!

Veronica said, "Well, you shouldn't just do it for your mother."

On Mondays I had debate team practice and I also had a fashion club meeting immediately following. Thank goodness, this demanding schedule was only one day a week.

As I went toward the room where the fashion club met, Melissa came up and asked to speak to me in private.

"So, Donna," she said. "When are you going to quit that stupid debate team? It doesn't really go with the image of the fashion club."

I told Melissa, "I have no intention of quitting the debate team."

Melissa stated sharply, "Well, you need to get your priorities straight if you plan to stay in this club." Then she softened up to tell me all about the practical joke the fashion club was planning to play on the homelier girls in the class. They were going to create a "slam" book to be passed around the class. It would be a notebook full of jokes and drawings about everyone, but mostly aimed at the "out" girls, like Veronica, and the way they looked and dressed. It was called a "slam" book because if the teachers caught you looking at it, you "slammed" it shut so they couldn't see.



"We want people to know that there is 'in' and there is 'out'," Melissa continued. She looked into my eyes. "By the way, Donna, I really want you to know that you do need to keep up with the group. There are plenty of girls who would love to be in the fashion club but weren't allowed. Some people think you shouldn't have been allowed. So you need to watch your step and go along with the group."

I ended up apprehensively participating in the production, creation, and passing out of the slam book. I didn't want to be drummed out of the fashion club, so I went along.

Veronica was mentioned a lot in the slam book. Oh, not directly. But everyone knew who was meant, and there were drawings that were clearly there to make fun of her. And everyone knew who made the slam book—the fashion club.

I felt terrible.

Veronica came up to me the morning after the “slam” book surfaced and said, “Donna, why did you let them say all of those negative things about me and pass around that horrible book? I want you to stop talking behind my back and letting the fashion club do it too. You're not my friend anymore.”

I felt really horrible. Veronica asked me to leave the debate team, and, of course, I did. I couldn't face her at meetings and practices anyway.

I spent all one night crying in my room. Words can really hurt people, and I was hurting from Veronica's words to me and also from Melissa's way of talking to me before—saying that I might not be kept in the fashion club if I didn't go along with the slam book—acting like I really wasn't good enough to belong there.

Well, my mom might have wanted me to be a fashion designer, but her solution to the whole problem was pretty simple: “Quit the fashion club and apologize to Veronica.”

I approached Melissa the following day to tell her that I formally quit the fashion club because I didn't agree with their treatment of some of the students at our school.

Melissa said, “It's your loss. It was a privilege for you to be in the club, and now you're giving away that privilege. Anyway, you're easily replaceable.”

Then and there I knew I had made the right decision to quit the club. I immediately went to Veronica and asked her for her forgiveness.



I told her, “Veronica, I quit the fashion club. I miss the debate team and would like to be back on it, if possible. I am sorry for hurting you and getting caught up in the clique.”

Veronica accepted my apology and allowed me to rejoin the debate team. After a long time, she started to trust me again.

I learned that a true friend likes you for who you are. You don't always have to be "proving" yourself, especially by hurting others. I started to wonder if all the "in" groups in the world are only "in" because they spend all their time making other people "out". I'd rather spend my time making real friends, thank you.

Questions

1. What is your definition of friendship?

2. Talk about what good friends do for one another. Do they accept others for who they are, listen to one another, enjoy the same interests and each other's company, support each other's needs, avoid teasing and put downs, avoid gossip, etcetera? What else do good friends do for one another?

3. What role did Donna's mother play in her membership in the fashion club?

4. Talk about ways to strengthen friendships.

5. Talk about ways that friendships end.

6. Do you think Donna did the right thing?

7. What things did Melissa say and do that showed she was not a true friend to Donna?

Exercise

Play "Telephone". This game should vividly show you how the real story about a person gets twisted when it is repeated behind people's backs.

Chapter 6: Making Grandfather Proud

It was the morning of my grandpa's funeral, Mr. Richard Lewis Van Horn. My grandpa was my best friend in the world, even though I have an older brother named Jeffrey and a younger sister named Tiffany.

My grandpa taught me how to fish and how to throw a perfect screwball. He also taught me how to make scrambled eggs, even though I wasn't supposed to be using the stove.



My grandpa would also tell me all of his war stories. I loved him, but my grandpa was very sick. He had cancer, and by the time we found out, it was just a matter of time before he passed away. He tried chemotherapy and other alternative drugs, but nothing seemed to cure it. The cancer had spread too quickly.

I was sad every day back then, because I did not know which was going to be my last day with my grandpa.

I would tell my grandpa, "Grandpa, please don't leave me. I need you to teach me some more things. And I want to hear some more war stories."

My grandpa would say, "Boy, don't be sad about me. Just keep learning from your parents and remember all of the lessons that I taught you."

All of those times were now memories.

I am young, so it was hard for me to deal with death, especially the death of someone so close to me. I was sick for the first three days after my grandpa passed away.

When the day of the funeral came, I put on my best suit and said a silent prayer before we headed to the church.

After the funeral, we had a big dinner. It was nice because I saw all of my family and a lot of my grandpa's friends that he often told me stories about. My grandpa would have been proud of his "homecoming". I felt he was there in spirit.

But I could not just go on like my parents and the rest of my family members said I should. It just hurt too much. I had lost my best friend. I didn't know how I was going to bounce back from this death. I had a hard time paying attention in school or wanting to study at all, I was hurting so much. My grades started to go down.

I would ask my dad, "Dad, I am hurting on the inside, and I don't know how to stop the pain."

My dad responded, "Son, I know you are hurting. We all are, but your grandpa would not want you to just give up. You have to find the inner strength to help you move on. Don't ever forget your grandpa, and make him proud of your accomplishments. He will always be with you in spirit."



I listened to my dad and understood what he was saying. I also knew I wanted my grandpa to be proud of me.

I said to his picture, "Grandpa, I will always make you proud of me. I will do my best at whatever I attempt. I will respect my parents and continue to throw a perfect screwball."

I started to go to school early to study for tests and I approached each of my teachers to find out if I could possibly do any extra credit to help boost my grades. I started to bring up all of my grades because I remembered that my grandpa said to do my best in everything I try.

I would get an A or a B on an assignment or test and whisper, "Grandpa, this one is for you. I told you I would do my best."

I continued to do well over the years in school, and I made my grandpa's life and death my motivating factor. I was also able to handle other deaths of family members a little easier as I got older because of the death of my grandpa and what he taught me. He

taught me to enjoy the moments you have with someone and to make him proud of you once that person is gone.

My grandpa is still my best friend!

Questions

1. Have you ever lost any close friends, family members, or pets?

2. How did that make you feel?

3. What did you do to feel better or to help others around you feel better?

4. How do you keep the memory of that person or pet alive?

5. Do you see death as a natural part of life, or do you see it as something scary and weird? Why?

6. Sadness is an important human emotion. What do you do when you are sad?

7. It is important to grieve when we lose someone or something. Grieving means letting ourselves feel as sad as we can and letting our pain out in tears. Have you grieved over something or someone or some other kind of loss? How did you feel after you cried?

Exercise

Imagine it is many years from today, and you have died. Your grandchild (grandson or granddaughter—you choose!) is about to write an article for the local newspaper about your life and what you meant to him/her, the things you taught him or her, what kind of a person you were and what kind of a life you led.

What does your grandchild write about you?

Chapter 7: The Melting Pot

I was caught in the middle of two worlds: the world of my neighborhood and the world of my school. In my neighborhood, you see a melting pot of many different races and nationalities. We had Asians, Hispanics, and African-Americans as well as Caucasians. I was friends with kids from all the groups!

At school, it was a different story. I attended private school. My school was 90% Caucasian, about 5% Asian, and about 5% African-American.

I am an African-American girl. My name is Keisha Fuller. My mother is a lawyer and my father is a circuit court judge.

It was hard at first to “fit in” at my school, but because my parents ran in the same professional circles as the parents of the kids there, the kids accepted me a little more easily. They kept seeing me at various functions with my parents, and so did their parents. I was beginning to be accepted.

When it was time for my birthday party, it was hard to choose who to invite. I was allowed to have eight friends to my party. We were going skating and then out to pizza. I didn't want my school friends and my neighborhood friends to clash. Even though our neighborhood was nice and everyone came from "good homes", my school friends tended to look at people for what they had, what their parents drove, and how big and fancy their house was. I had just been entering the “inner” circle at school, so I didn't want to do anything to blow my social standing.



I knew I had to invite Julie Chang, my good neighborhood friend. My school friends would like her since her father was a big wig at IBM. Then there was Shawntele, another good neighborhood friend. I was not sure about inviting her because she was a bit loud at times, and my school friends might confuse that with being low class. But she was one of my oldest friends and one of the first kids I met when my family moved into the neighborhood.

I also wanted to invite Leticia Alvarez and Julissa Ventura because they were also my close friends, and their dads owned a chain of grocery and clothing stores, and I knew my school friends would be impressed that they came from rich families.

My school friends would be much easier to select from. I would invite Simone Thomas, the most "popular" girl at school. Then I would invite Mindy Wetherby, Wendy Kirsten, and Jessica Wong. They were very "popular" too. There! That was it! Eight people.

I was getting more and more excited. My mom and I picked out some nice invitations in my favorite color—violent purple. The party should be a blast!

Everyone RSVPed on time except for Simone. I was wondering if she would she even attend at all. When I saw her in the hallways at school the next day, I asked her if she planning on attending.

Simone responded, "Oh. Yeah." I wondered why she hadn't bothered to answer my invitation. Still, I was excited that she was coming.

All of my guests arrived around the same time. I was excited to see everyone and they all seemed to be getting along fine, which I had been worried about, combining my two worlds. My mom served everyone lemonade and homemade cookies when they arrived.

Simone was fashionably late.

She showed up about thirty minutes later than everyone else. When she stepped into my house, she looked around as if it was not good enough for her. Instead of saying "Hello", to my mom, she treated her as if she were the hired help and said to her, "Where do I put my things?" She looked around as if she wanted to leave just as quickly as she came.

We headed to the skating rink, and we had a pretty good time, except for Simone complaining about everything and getting on everyone's nerves.



Simone said, “This skating rink’s floors are too slippery. I keep falling, and I am an award-winning ice skater, so I have no idea why I can’t seem to stay on my feet.”

I glanced nervously at my school friends to see what they were thinking. Did they also think the skating rink's floors weren't good enough?

Then we left the skating rink and headed to the movies. Simone again complained that the movie was too short, and the popcorn was cold. My neighborhood friends were rolling their eyes by that time and giving me meaningful looks as if to say, "Can't you shut her up?" My school friends were silent.

After the movies, we went to the pizza parlor near my house and, of course, Simone just had to say, “This place isn’t half as good as Geno’s Gourmet Pizza Bistro in my neighborhood.”



By now, even my school friends were rolling their eyes at Simone's comments. They started to get very cosy with my neighborhood friends. Shawntele was talking to Wendy; Julie and Mindy were practically falling out of their seats laughing at each other's jokes; Julissa, Letricia, and Jessica shared a common dislike of math and were describing their struggles at their different schools to one another. It was a real melting pot. I was very happy, except I was stuck talking to Simone.

Once we finished eating pizza, we headed back to my house. When Simone gave our landscaping a snooty glance and opened her mouth, Shawntele could be silent no longer.

"I have been trying to hold my tongue all day, but you have gone too far, little Miss Snob!" she said right in Simone's face.

"Why, you loud..." began Simone.

As everything started to fall apart, I suddenly I realized my mistakes. I had invited people for many of the wrong reasons. Even though I really liked every girl there, I had invited some just because they were popular—like Simone—or just to impress them, or just because they were rich, and I thought they would be accepted on that basis.

I jumped in between the two girls and said, “Simone, you have been complaining ever since you got here. If you would like my mom to call your mother to pick you up, let me know. And anyone else who thinks they are either too good or not good enough for this party can go home if they want to.” I had to hold back my tears. “I really like all of you, and I just want us to have a good time together.”

Everyone looked at the floor and sort of peeped up at each other to see what everyone else was thinking and feeling.

Simone surprised me by saying, “No, I would rather stay.” Then she said softly, looking at our disapproving school friends, “Sorry if I was a jerk.”

Everyone said they were sorry to each other—even people who hadn't done anything wrong! I guess when you bring different people together, either they will sink or swim.

Well, my friends swam. I even saw Shawntele and Simone smiling at each other as I opened my presents. I was really sorry I had invited people for reasons other than just plain liking them. Once I let go of all those ideas, I had the best party—and the best time of my life—with my eight best friends in the world. The differences just melted away!

Questions

1. Do you have a friend from another race or culture or from a different school?

2. What are some of your similarities? Differences?

3. What was Keisha's mistake in inviting her school and neighborhood friends?

4. Did she really like the girls as friends? Prove what you say with words from the story.

5. Why do you think Simone changed her attitude?

6. Were all of Keisha's school friends as snobbish as Simone? What in the story tells you so?

7. Why is the story called "the melting pot"? Have you ever heard this term before? What do you think it means?

8. Were the girls able to all melt together well at the end?

Exercise

Pair up with someone you don't normally talk to very much. Give this person a "Personality Quiz" by asking the following questions:

1. What is your favorite movie?
2. What is your favorite food?
3. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
4. Do you have a pet?
5. What is your favorite color?
6. What is the best book you've ever read?
7. What do you like to do in your free time?
8. If you were an animal, which animal would you like to be and why?
9. If you could change one thing in this world, what would it be?
10. What do you want to be when you grow up?

Chapter 8: It's Okay to Be in Second Place

Everyone knew I was next in line to become the state champion in the hundred-yard dash for our age group. I have been running all of my life, and I have improved my running time each year. I just missed the state track meet finals cut-off last year, and I was determined that it would not happen again.

I have won just about every major track meet in my hometown of Los Angeles, California and the surrounding areas. I even won first place at the regional track meet that was held in San Diego, California, which some of the best runners in the state participated in. Most people call me “Flash” because I am so fast.

Coach Williams always tells me, “Charlie, you are so fast that when you run, all people see is a flash of light.”



Coach Williams has been coaching me for the last three years, and he is very encouraging to our team. He often tells me to learn from my mistakes, demonstrate good sportsmanship, and just keep on running.

The state track meet was to be held in San Francisco, California, and I was so excited to attend and participate this year. I knew I was strong, fast, and ready for the challenge.

The state track meet was like no other because you are competing against the very best in the state. There were two guys that I often heard about and who would be my major competition in the hundred-yard dash. One of them was Joey McIntyre and the other was Dwight Filbricht. Joey was from San Jose, California, and he had won most of the East Bay track meets, and Dwight was from Fresno, California, and he had won most of the central California track meets. Now it was my turn to prove to them all I was a worthy competitor. I knew I was the best in the state and I was going to prove it.

My track club, which was called the “Trailblazers”, left Los Angeles for the track meet about three days before the event began. It was a seven-hour bus ride to San Francisco, and my coach wanted our team to have plenty of time to practice and get prepared.

When we arrived at San Francisco State University, which is where the meet was being held, I got butterflies in my stomach.

Coach Williams told the team, “Okay, guys. This is what we worked hard all year long to accomplish.”

I blurted out, “Ah, Coach. Don’t worry about a thing, because 'Flash' won’t let you down.”

Coach Williams responded, “Charlie, that is the wrong attitude. We are a team. It's not just you, but everyone. And remember that the best winners make even better losers.”

I said underneath my breath so that Coach couldn’t hear me, “I don’t lose.”

After our first practice on the field, Coach Williams pulled me to the side and told me, “Charlie, you must learn humility. Now, you are a good runner among the people you have competed against in L.A., but the state track meet is an entirely different environment. Most of these kids have been competing all of their lives and have been at the state level before. So please just stay focused. Your only competition is YOU. Don’t look to your left or your right. Just look at yourself.”

I heard what Coach Williams was saying, but it didn’t truly sink in. I was "Flash"—the best in the state.



The track meet was extremely exciting, but I had to wait half the day just for my event—the 100 yard dash. Once my event was called, I looked into the crowd and saw my mother, father, and my little sister all smiling and waving at me.

I had to focus and keep my mind on the race, but I knew I was going to win. I had to. I was the best!

I heard the announcer say, “On your mark, get set...”

Then the gun sounded, and we were off.

I could see Dwight and Joey moving toward the front. I was in third place.

I told myself, “Charlie, you can do this.” I gained on them and then put them behind me.

Then, all of a sudden, this kid came out of nowhere. I didn’t even know his name and had never heard anything about him. I found out later he was from Oakland, California. He ended up winning the race! I, unfortunately, came in second, but at least I beat Dwight and Joey. But who was this real "Flash"?

I was upset at myself for letting the runners psyche me out. I had looked at my competitors too often to see where they were. I should have remembered what Coach Williams told me earlier, “Your only competition is YOU,” and just run to beat my own best time.

My event was the last of the day, so all of my teammates came over to congratulate me. I still felt like I should have been number one. Coach told me to go over and introduce myself to the kid who won. I found out his name was Dante Miller. This was his first race.

I shook his hand and congratulated him and asked, “Where did you learn how to run like that?”

He laughed and said, “Just practice I guess.” He went on, “Congratulations to you, too! *You are good.*”

I realized then that it was okay to be in second place. It was my first state meet, so I had a lot of time to grow and try again.

I walked off the field, remembering the words of Coach Williams: “The best winners make even better losers.” I threw back my shoulders and walked with my chin up, smiling at everyone I saw. So I wasn't the best in the state. I was second best. But I was looking forward to meeting Dante again next year—on the track field!

Questions

1. Do you play a sport, or do you prefer to be a spectator? If you do play, what sport(s) do you play?

2. Do you prefer individual competitive sports or team sports?

3. Competitions are common in schools. Do you participate in any kind of competitions or contests—music, art, writing, debate, or others?

4. Do you think it is important to always be first or number one in a competition?

5. How do you feel when you don't win?

6. How does a "sore loser" act?

7. How does a good winner act?

8. Do you think it is good to be as confident as Charlie was or was he a little overconfident?

9. How did his competitor, Dante, make him feel better about his loss?

10. Do you think Charlie will win next year? Why?

Exercise

You are going to debate on the idea of trophies. In many competitions, a participation trophy or certificate is given to each participant at the end of the season, not just the winners. Do you think that is fair, even if they did not contribute much in the games or weren't that good? Choose a side to be on about this issue, think of the reasons why you think that way.

Chapter 9: Teacher's Pet

My name is Tonya, and this is a story about a teacher's pet named Gabriella.

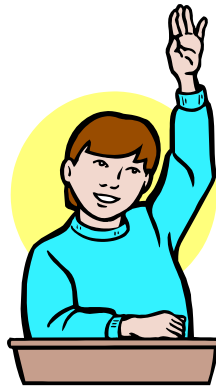
"That Gabriella gets on my nerves," said Jennifer. "She plays up to Mrs. Castillo every chance she gets."

Alice said, "Yeah, she is always doing whatever she can to help Mrs. Castillo. If Mrs. Castillo asks for a volunteer or someone to run an errand for her to the office, Gabriella is the first one with her hand up."

Jennifer said, "Gabriella is a teacher's pet. She acts like she is obsessed with Mrs. Castillo."

As we all took our seats in class, Mrs. Castillo announced, "All right, class. Please take your seats so we can begin our morning math warm-up."

After the problems were written on the chalkboard, Mrs. Castillo asked, "Who is ready to come to the board to help me solve the first problem?"



Of course, Gabriella's hand shot up into the air. Gabriella got the answer correct and received a smile of approval from Mrs. Castillo, which Gabriella just basked in.

When class was over, it was time for lunch. I sat with Jennifer and Alice. We have known each other since kindergarten. We saw Gabriella sit down with Mrs. Castillo. Gabriella was always bragging how she got to eat lunch twice a week with Mrs. Castillo.

None of us cared because we liked eating lunch together. But to Gabriella this was a special time to be able to spend time with her favorite teacher. No one truly understood why she wanted to spend so much time with Mrs. Castillo.

Gabriella was new to our school; this was her first year. She probably would have made more friends if she weren't so smart and didn't want the whole world to know it. That's what got on our nerves.

Alice and Jennifer really had it in for Gabriella. They wouldn't even talk to her outside of class, nor would they ever invite her to eat lunch at "our" table.

When they saw her sit down with Mrs. Castillo, they snorted, "Teacher's pet!"

Kenneth, who was Gabriella's only student friend, told them to be quiet and to back off of Gabriella.

He said, "Alice, why do you and Jennifer always bother Gabriella in math class? I think you are just jealous because she is one of the smartest students."

Alice responded, "No, you are wrong, Kenneth. We are not jealous of someone like Gabriella."

Kenneth said, "What do you mean—someone like Gabriella?"

"She just means that Gabriella has nothing for us to be jealous of," chimed in Jennifer.

"That's even worse," said Kenneth. "You talk about her like she's just nothing."

Good thing he didn't hear Alice whisper, "She is just nothing. Nothing but a teacher's pet."

The next morning, before Mrs. Castillo came into class, Gabriella was bragging about being ready for the up-and-coming test and how she was going to make Mrs. Castillo proud of her.

Alice burst out, "What a teacher's pet you are. You're always bragging about you and Mrs. Castillo. I don't understand why you are so obsessed with Mrs. Castillo. Frankly, it is creepy."



Gabriella responded while holding back tears, "I just love Mrs. Castillo. She is so nice and kind." She bit her lip and then ran out of the classroom in tears.

Kenneth said, "Alice, you are so stupid. Didn't you know that Gabriella's mother was killed in a car accident when a drunk driver hit her head-on, just before she moved here?"

The reason Gabriella spends so much time with Mrs. Castillo is because she reminds Gabriella of her mother. Gabriella's mother had long dark hair, wore glasses, and had a big smile—just like Mrs. Castillo. And Mrs. Castillo has tried to be a little bit of a mother to Gabriella."

Alice and Jennifer felt terrible now, and everyone was looking at them—and at me—as if we were monsters.

"Hey," I said. "Don't look at me. I don't say anything bad about Gabriella."

"You don't stop them either," said Marcia, one of the girls in the class.

When she found out how mean Alice and Jennifer had been about Gabriella, Mrs. Castillo was furious. She told Alice and Jennifer she wanted to speak to both of them after class. Mrs. Castillo stared at me for a long time, and then she decided to let me go. I breathed a sigh of relief, but I knew Marcia was right. I hadn't done enough to stop them in their tormenting of Gabriella.

Mrs. Castillo told Alice and Jennifer, "You shouldn't talk badly about people and mistreat them when you don't know their backgrounds or what has happened in their lives."

Alice responded, "Mrs. Castillo, I am so sorry. I didn't know Gabriella lost her mother. I can't even imagine not having my mom around."

Mrs. Castillo told the girls, "You owe Gabriella an apology. And a lot more kindness!"

Alice and Jennifer apologized to Gabriella. Alice gave Gabriella a hug and invited her to start spending time with her and her family on weekends. Actually, the whole thing made Gabriella feel better. She began a new friendship with the very girls who had given her such grief in the past. And Alice and Jennifer found out in the end that Gabriella was a nice girl.



Mrs. Castillo didn't need to tell me to apologize to Gabriella or make friends with her. I was more than ready to.

Questions

1. What do you believe is the definition of a “Teacher’s Pet?”

2. Have you ever been considered a “Teacher’s Pet?”

3. Why was Gabriella so drawn to Mrs. Castillo?

4. Was it right for the other girls to judge Gabriella so harshly?

5. Can you imagine that maybe people you make fun of or dislike have some secret pain in their lives?

Exercise

Think of a person that you consider "out" or someone you would never want to be friends with. Now think of possible reasons why that person is the way he or she is. Imagine that he or she has some situation at home like Gabriella's; perhaps it is not the death of a parent, but maybe there is some unhappiness or poverty or illness in his or her family that makes this person's life hard. What can you do to be a little kinder to this person?

Chapter 10: Grades Do Count

It was the morning of our big social studies test, but I wasn't worried. I always got Cs on my tests and assignments in social studies without even trying, so I figured this would be no different. My parents thought that was the best I could do, but I knew I was capable of getting As and Bs. I just didn't want to put in the time and effort to study.

Timothy is one of my good friends at school.

He would always tell me, "Franklin you should at least try to pick up a book and study. I know you could get better grades."

"No," I said. "I have better things to do."

Timothy continued, "Don't you care about your grades? You know, grades do count."

I shot back, "I can get a C on any of Mrs. Garcia's tests and not even crack open a book. So I'll keep using my method, and you keep using yours."

He said, "Well you should care about getting grades higher than C," as he walked away.

Mrs. Garcia told the class, "All right, class. Let's clear off our desktops so we can get ready to take our test on the Declaration of Independence."

The test results came back about three days later. Timothy and a few of the other kids in my social studies class were anxiously waiting to get their tests back. I was not worried. I knew I had gotten another C, as usual.



Mrs. Garcia passed out the test, and Timothy was happy he got an A. I got mine back, and just like I thought—a big fat C. Not bad for absolutely no effort whatsoever!

After class, Mrs. Garcia pulled me to the side and told me, "Franklin, if you applied yourself more in class, you could easily get an A or a B."

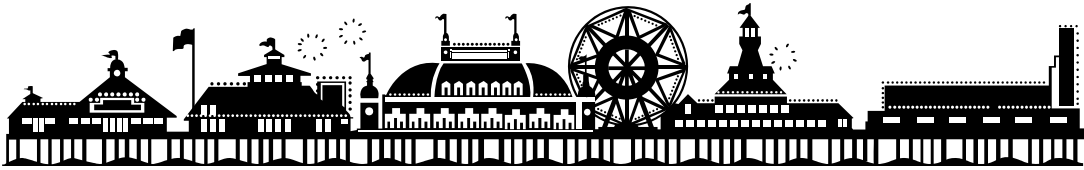
I just looked at Mrs. Garcia, wondering how she knew I didn't "apply myself."

I told her, "I tried my best."

She just shook her head. She obviously didn't believe me.

When I arrived at school the following Monday, there was a major announcement from the principal, Mr. Fields.

"Any student who has attained all A and Bs for the past two quarters will receive an all-expenses-paid ticket to the new amusement park, Thrill World. This is a VIP pre-opening just for children from the area schools who have achieved the honor roll. Because it is so select, the lines to the rides won't be long at all. Congratulations to our honor roll and super honor roll students!"



Some of the kids in my class cheered and gave each other "high fives". Timothy was definitely going because he gets all As and a few Bs.

For the first time in my life, I was jealous of kids who made good grades. I had always wanted to go to Thrill World. I bet I have seen the commercials over a hundred times.

I thought to myself, "I guess grades do count for something." I felt that if I had "applied myself" I would be going to Thrill World as well. All because I did not want to study, it cost me a great trip that everyone would be talking about all year long. They would be talking about the rides I would have to wait to ride. They would know all of the shows and the special park features before I did. What a drag.

When my parents saw me moping around the house, they tried to encourage me, saying that they understood school was hard for me.

I burst out, "It's not that hard! I get Cs without even trying! I just don't try! Stop treating me like I'm stupid."

My mom looked thoughtful and then she said, "Mrs. Garcia told me you needed to apply yourself more. I thought she just didn't understand your limitations. I just thought you found the work too hard. I didn't mean to treat you like you were stupid—"

"Well," said my dad. "It is pretty stupid to get lower grades than you're capable of just out of laziness!"

My parents then talked to me a lot about grades. Not only did I miss out on rewards like Thrill World by not trying. If I kept getting middle grades because I wasn't diligent, I would limit my opportunities for a good life. More than that, though, they told me I would be missing out on a kind of inner pride and satisfaction—the pride and satisfaction of a job well done.

The school never offered another free Thrill World trip to honor roll students. I know, because I was on the honor roll from then on, and I never got one. But it did feel good to know I was doing my best and learning all the things I needed to know to have a better life later on.

"Education is the key to success in life," my parents said.

Since I see life as a thrilling adventure anyway, I guess I'm on my way to a different kind of Thrill World—through education!

Questions

1. Do your grades matter to you? Why or why not?

2. On a scale of 1-10 how much do your grades count with you, with 10 being the highest?

3. Do you feel you give each test and/or assignment your very best effort? Or do you think you could do better?

4. Why do you think grades are important?

5. When do you think grades count? Getting into a good college? Getting a good job?

6. Do your parents ever reward you with money or other things when you get good grades?

7. Do you realize that gaining knowledge is rewarding in itself?

8. We have a wonderful world around us. Learning about it is exciting. Do you think you will enjoy life more if you understand it?

Exercise

This week, time yourself doing your school or homework. Take just fifteen extra minutes every night to read over any notes, chapters, or assignments from your classes or subjects. By the end of the week you would have invested an extra hour and fifteen minutes of reviewing. Watch and see if your grades go up or your interest increases!

Chapter 11: Me and My Things

"Billy, go back to your room this minute and pick up your things if you want to go outside today!" Mom yelled this at me just as I ran out the door to meet the guys for our regular Saturday soccer game. But this time, I knew that things were different. Sure, she'd yelled at me before for leaving a sloppy room, but this time there was real anger in her voice.

Telling her, "This is *my* room, so why can't I keep it the way I like?" didn't seem to work any more. The huge piles of stuff I had created on the floor, desk, dresser, bookcase, and in the closet were about to change my life.

Mom was just plain fed up. I could tell by the look in her eyes as I marched up the stairs and confronted the mess that had been waiting for me a long time. All through elementary school, Mom had told me that if I wanted to get good grades, first I had to keep my room neat and take good care of my things. She called it "staying organized", which meant not only I could find my things better, but others could too.

"If no one else can find something, then it isn't properly organized," she would say.



Her words rang true when, one day, I forgot to bring my book report to school the day it was due. It was a major part of our grade for that course, so it was really important. I called home and told Mom what had happened and asked her to bring it in to the school before that class. As I sweated anxiously on the other end of the phone, she looked and looked through the piles of old homework papers, comic books, teen magazines, video-game instructions, movie reviews, and sports records that lined my room. I sort of knew where I had put the report, and I sort of didn't, so I kept telling her places to try while she got more and more upset with me. When she opened my closet door and a mountain of rock-star posters and music sheets tumbled out, my fate was sealed.

"You are just going to have to learn from this. Goodbye!" mom said, just before hanging up.

"Mom! Mom!" I called out desperately. "Can't you keep looking? Mom! Aren't you going to bring the report?"

Apparently, she wasn't. I skulked to class and tried to make myself as small in my desk as possible. It was embarrassing when the teacher leafed through the reports after everyone turned them in and looked at me with beady eyes:

"Patrick? I don't see your book report in here. Did you turn it in?"

"Yes," I said. Then I said, "Oh. I must have left it at home."

Everyone laughed and I turned bright red. I felt pretty stupid.

"Every day late is half off on your grade," the teacher informed me.

When I went home that day, even I couldn't find the report in my room. It was really maddening because I had done it. I had put a lot of time in on it. I finally found it the next day and turned it in. The teacher said, "Two days late. Even if you got an A on it, it went down to a C the first day late, and the second day, it went down to a D." She looked over my paper. "Too bad. It looks like you did a lot of work on this."

I went home very sad that day. When I get bad grades, I get grounded, and my grade in that subject was going to be a bad one. I tried to blame my mom, telling myself it was all her fault. But I knew it wasn't.

"Patrick?" my mom called up the stairs. "Are you doing your homework?"

"I'm going to," I called back. "After I clean my room."

Questions

1. Do you know what it means to be "organized"?

2. The word "organized" is related to "organs" like the systems that work in your body to keep you healthy. What if your body wasn't organized? Do you think you'd feel as well as you do every day? Could you do as much as you do?

3. Why do think that Billy had to learn the hard way about taking care of his things?

4. Do you think Billy's mom was right or wrong to let him take the consequences of his actions?

5. In what ways are you like, or unlike, Billy? Explain why.

6. What does a room say about the person who lives there?

7. If a person owns lots of "cool things," does that make him or her better than someone who does not? Explain your answer.

8. Is it better to have a lot of things and not take care of them or better to have a few and take care of them well, so they last and are useful for a long time?

Exercise

One of the main principles of organization is to group things that are alike together. Go home tonight and begin to organize your room or living area by putting things that are alike together. Put all your shirts in one area, all pants or skirts together in one section of the closet. Put all your CDs in their cases and line them up in one spot. Put school books in one place and library or personal books in another area nearby. Gather up any pencils or pens or crayons and put them all in one pile—a rubber band will keep them neatly gathered together.

When you read, you may notice that paragraphs are full of sentences that are alike or contain things about one common subject. This is how writing is organized.

Organization is everywhere! It makes life easier and more pleasant to keep things organized. Plus, you will always know where to find something when you need it!

Chapter 12: Time with Mom and Dad

“What do you mean you don’t have time to come to my game?” Libby half yelled at her parents one Saturday afternoon. “You never have any time for me! And when you do have time, you are too tired to do anything!”

Libby was so upset that tears came to her eyes, and her small body shook. Libby was a soccer star on the local team, and she wanted her parents at the weekend games, rooting for her.

“Don’t they care about me at all?” Libby thought, remembering how she felt scoring a goal without Mom and Dad there to admire her skill. She was really beginning to think her parents didn’t love her anymore.

The thought of this bothered Libby so much that she decided to sneak around the house on a Saturday morning to spy on her parents. What were they doing to make themselves so tired? With what were they so busy? She was sure she would find them doing things they could skip. Then she would jump out at them and say, “Aha! You think this is more important than your own daughter!”

So Libby left soccer practice early one Saturday morning and hid in a closet. She let the door open just a crack. Her mother, breathing hard, passed by carrying an enormous basket of dirty laundry. She plunked the basket down next to the washing machine with a sigh, and began sorting the laundry into piles. Libby’s mother loaded one load into the washing machine and turned it on. Then she went into the kitchen and put away dishes until the washing machine stopped. Then she unloaded the washing machine to dry the clothes, loaded it with a fresh pile to be washed, and walked by the closet again, carrying a heavy basket of clean clothes to be put away in the different areas of all the members of the family. She was gone for some time. Then she returned with another big basket of dirty laundry.



Libby clearly remembered telling her mother she wanted a certain outfit clean by Monday so she could wear it to school. She had been pretty demanding that it be done. She felt a little guilty about that now.

After a few trips carrying heavy baskets, Libby saw her mother wipe her brow with her hand, because it was sweating. Libby saw her glance at the huge pile of dirty dishes in the kitchen and sigh.

Her mother muttered, "I guess I'll do those after the next load of laundry. And the kitchen floor needs to be swept or we'll get ants." Her mother sighed at how hard it was to keep up with all the work of a household.

Libby had no idea her mom worked so hard on weekends. Libby felt like bringing her some ice water, but she was afraid to reveal her hiding place.

Then she suddenly thought, "What is Dad doing now?"

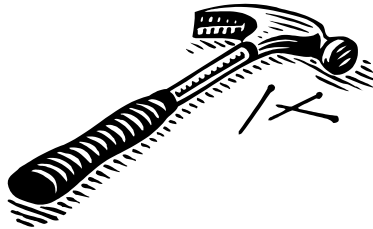
Libby heard pounding coming from the attic. She climbed the narrow stairs and discovered her father delicately balancing on a wooden ladder as he reached down for nails with one hand then hammered them into the beams of the ceiling with another.

"Don't want the house to fall down around our heads," her father sighed. "Wish I could afford to pay someone to do this, but I can't, so..."

Her father was spending his weekends off from work repairing the house, and Libby had been too busy with her activities to even notice.

At that point, Libby started to cry. She didn't know why. She just cried.

She picked up the jar of nails, walked to the bottom of the ladder, and said, "Dad, I'll hold the nails for you while you hammer."



Her father simply smiled down at her, saying in a soft, reassuring voice, "Thanks for the help." Libby then thought that as soon as she finished helping her dad, that her mom sure could use that glass of ice water, as well as help with all that laundry.

Her parents smiled and relaxed when Libby offered her help. In fact, because of her, they got finished early and were able to take her out for ice cream.

"If I help with the chores tomorrow, will you have enough time to come to my soccer game?" she asked them.

" I think we can," said her father, and her mother nodded.

It turned out to be the best weekend Libby had spent in a long time. Chores weren't so bad after all. And it was great having her parents watch her score the winning goal in the soccer game!

Questions

1. Why do you think that Libby got so angry that her parents were not spending enough time with her on the weekends? Was it normal for her to feel this way?

2. Libby didn't understand what her parents were doing to make them so busy and tired. What were they doing?

3. Libby finally began helping her parents with the household chores. Do you think that this will continue, or will Libby slip back to her old, "me first" ways next weekend? Explain your answer.

4. Should children get paid for helping with family chores or is it the duty of every family member to help out?

5. Sometimes we like one job better than another. What kind of family chores do you/would you like to do?

6. What do you think it means to your parents when they see you doing household chores, or when you volunteer to do them?

7. Do you like to spend time with your parents? Do you think they will be less busy and tired if you help out more?

Exercise

Describe how your family organizes its household chores. Does everyone have a regular assignment (dishes, trash, vacuuming, lawn mowing, laundry, etc.), or do just a few people do most of the work? What can be done to organize your family's chores more fairly, so that everyone is contributing something and a few people are not doing too much? How can working together improve the quality of your family life? Write it all down and then tell your parents about your plan. See if they decide to try it out!

Chapter 13: Suzy's Skills

Suzy had lived on a small farm her whole life. Her family's farm was far from the nearest town.

Life was very simple on the farm. Suzy learned to read and write from her mother and do arithmetic from her father. She also learned a great deal by doing chores. She knew how to collect eggs from the chickens, put food out for the other small farm animals, and help her mom in the kitchen garden. Once a cow wandered off, and Suzy spent the better part of a day helping her dad find her. She really liked farm life. Suzy was learning everything she needed to know to successfully live on a farm.

But everything changed drastically when Suzy's dad came home one day and announced that he had gotten a job at the factory in the faraway town. For years, Suzy had known that they might have to move away from the farm. Large companies were buying up family farms, and they could produce so much with their big, expensive machines that family farms couldn't compete with their prices. Her father had been having a hard time for a long time. Still, it had never been a reality before, and Suzy and her whole family had been hoping it would never happen.

When the moving truck arrived and she had to load her boxes on it, everything became all too real. There were still tears in her eyes when Suzy saw the town's buildings growing bigger on the horizon as the sun was setting.



When they pulled up to their new home, Suzy's dad excitedly said, "Welcome to our new life, everyone! Let's make the best of it!" He looked hopeful, and some of the worried lines had left his forehead. Suzy nodded her head and did her best to smile. She then unloaded her things and carried them into her new home.

"Things will never be the same," she thought as she fell asleep, exhausted from the day's work of moving and her many emotions.

Suzy's morning began with her mom waking her up, rushing her downstairs for a quick breakfast, and then taking her to school. Her whole school life had taken place at the kitchen table! Now Suzy was entering a whole new world. What would school be like? Would she make any friends there? Could she pass her courses? She didn't even know if

she was dressed properly. Would the other kids make fun of her? Maybe they would know right away she was from the farm. Sometimes town kids looked down on country kids.

“Hi, my name’s Dee. Are you new here?” asked a short blond girl with a bright face sitting next to her in class. After admitting she was new, Suzy finally felt some possibility of fitting in. It was a good feeling.

“Glad to meet you, Dee. We just moved here yesterday, and it’s my first day in any kind of school,” Suzy confided.

“I’ll show you around,” said Dee cheerfully.

From that point on, Dee was like Suzy’s guardian angel. She taught the anxious newcomer everything she needed to know to survive in school.

“This is how we open our lockers,” said Dee, as Suzy fumbled with the dial on the combination lock.



“Wow, I can do it!” Suzy boasted as she opened her locker on the fifth try.

“If you think lockers are tough, wait until you try out the computers in the school library,” said Dee in a challenging tone.

Once in the library, Dee spent a half hour showing Suzy how to log on the computer, write a document, use e-mail, and even explore the Internet. All this was new to Suzy, but she could tell a whole new world was opening up for her. With each new skill Dee taught her, Suzy listened attentively. Somehow, she knew her future would depend on these skills.

Suzy's mother and father had taught her well, and the books and lessons on the black board seemed familiar to Suzy. She sighed a sigh of relief. She was not behind, then. In fact, it seemed, she was a little ahead.

Dee walked home with her that day.

"I think it's going to rain," Dee said, glancing at the sky.

"No, I don't think so," said Suzy. "The leaves aren't showing their undersides. That's a surefire way we tell if it is going to rain on the farm. I don't feel much pressure in the air either. And the flies are quiet—they get busier before a storm. No, I don't think it is going to rain today."

When the rest of the afternoon passed without rain, Dee called Suzy on the phone.

"You've got some skills!" she said.

Remembering the locker and the computer, Suzy said, just as appreciatively, "So do you, my friend!" Suzy paused. "Is it okay to call you my friend?"

"Sure!" said Dee. "Please do!"

Questions

1. What skills have you learned that you think will help you in the future?

Explain why and how you learned them.

2. Have you taught yourself (self-learned) any skills on your own? What are they and how did you do it?

3. What are the most important skills you know? Explain why.

4. If you could learn one new skill, what would it be and why?

5. Did Suzy find out she had learned some valuable skills at home on the farm? What were they?

6. Do you think it is good to learn new skills?

7. Is making friends a skill?

8. Was Dee good at making new friends?

9. What did Dee do to show Suzy she wanted to be friends with her?

Exercise

Think of skills you are especially good at or what skills you would like to improve. Write them down.

Chapter 14: Righting a Wrong

No matter how hard Fred tried, things always seemed to get worse. And the funny thing was that Fred always meant well; he always tried to do his very best in whatever he did. If it was running track, he tried his hardest, even if it meant leaving the blocks before the starting gun, or giving someone a little shove during the race. If he ran for school office, Fred would say something really bad (and untrue) about his opponent, all for the sake of winning, of course. And in schoolwork, Fred thought nothing of copying an old A paper, one most everyone had forgotten about, if it meant helping his report card look good.

You see, Fred was one of those people who felt that “the end justified the means.” That meant that what you won was more important than how you won it. Fred believed that someday he was going to be a great person, and so what if he took a few liberties to reach that glorious point? But what Fred’s shortcut to fame and fortune meant in real terms was that he was creating a lot of hurt feelings and ill will along the way.



For each student that he copied off of during a test, there was a classmate that went into a state of confusion deciding whether to turn Fred in to the teacher, or just try and forget about it.

For every student running for class office who thought of employing the same dirty tricks that Fred did during an election campaign, there was the same conflict: “Should I drag myself down into the slime like him?”

Most of Fred’s opponents would say, “Oh, well, let the voters decide which candidate they can trust.” Of course, people sometimes tend to believe outrageous stories, especially ones that are mean, so Fred always got a lot of votes.

But little by little, over the months, classmates would come up to Fred, maybe in the hallway or maybe over a soda, and tell him, ever so gently, what they thought about his “style.”

“You know, Fred, we’re all getting kind of sore about the way you get things done. We feel like stepping stones, with you climbing on our heads to get up high,” they’d say. “If you can’t change your ways, you can forget about being friends anymore,” they warned.

After a few of those little informal chats, Fred began to think that maybe he needed to listen. He had always felt that the best way to be popular was to be successful. Now he found out that to keep his friends, he was going to have to play by the same rules as everyone else. That day was the most painful in his still-young life, because Fred realized that he was going to have to change. And change is never easy. But then it's not easy losing all your friends, either.

Questions

1. Do you think Fred was aware at first that he was bothering other people as he broke one rule of fair play after another? Explain your answer.

2. Do you ever find yourself acting like Fred?

3. If you were Fred’s friend, would it be difficult or easy to explain to him how much he was bothering you and others? What would you say to him?

5. Do “the ends ever justify the means?” If so, when?

6. Is it possible to achieve success while caring about other people’s feelings? If so, can you give some examples?

7. If a friend came up to you and said your behavior was offending a lot of people, what would your first reaction be, and why?

Exercise

How fair are you? Circle your answer in the following situations.

1. You run the school newspaper, which will be publishing the results of a vote for different students in various fun categories. The categories are: "Student with the most beautiful eyes," "Smartest student," "Best athlete," "Best sense of humor" and "Best friend." It is your responsibility to count the votes and write the article for the paper communicating to the other students.

You think you have a pretty good sense of humor—the best in the class—and other people think so too. You voted for someone else in that category, though, because you thought maybe you shouldn't vote for yourself. Now, counting the votes, you see you are tied with the person you voted for. You:

- Write in the paper that the category "Best Sense of Humor" was a tie. You figure no one else had a chance to change their vote—why should you?
- Change your vote and give yourself the extra vote you need to win. You were going to vote for yourself anyway.

2. Your friend, Kira, got invited to a birthday party. You did not get invited. You are jealous. You:

- Go up to the birthday girl and tell her that Kira comes from a really bad family and she shouldn't invite her to parties.
- Arrange with another friend or your family to have something fun to do that day yourself. Wish Kira a good time.

3. Your book has all the answers penciled in the margins. You:

- Show the teacher the book and ask her if you can erase them or change books. You want to learn what you need to know.
- Always be the first to raise your hand with the answer so others will think you are very smart.

Chapter 15: Over the Edge With "Brave" Bob

“Get your bicycle off the highway!” For as long as people could remember, Bob was a show-off, and a big one at that. Some kids would be content to ride their bikes on the sidewalk or on a quiet street. Not Bob. Bob just had to mix it up with fast-moving cars and trucks. Or he would take his skateboard into town and do flying leaps onto hand railings, or race around the insides of the empty public pool. And if that weren’t enough, our fearless hero would go out at night and climb telephone poles, water towers, and tall fire escapes.

Yes, Brave Bob seemed unafraid of anything that could be climbed up, slid down, jumped over, swum under, or run around. He had, in fact, become a legend in his own mind.

“Why, I’ve got more lives than a cat,” Bob boasted, recalling the time he jumped off a boat into the ocean and swam back to shore. “If I could just bottle this courage stuff I’ve got, I’d make a fortune,” added the muscular show-off.



Month in and month out, year after year, the courageous kid took chances. While some kids were content to get a ride to school, Bob just had to roller skate, in traffic. When others were content to attend a music concert, boisterous Bob had to dive into the crowd and “body surf” on the frenzied kids. There were no limits to what he might do. The more dangerous things got, the happier Bob became.

Most people seek comfort and safety. Mr. Nerves of Steel was at home in the unknown—the scarier and more dangerous, the better.

One day, Bob woke up bored. He no longer felt challenged by all the chances he was taking. He had to try something over the edge, off the map, outside the loop. He called all his friends—those people who had yelled their heads off while he risked fate—and asked them to meet him at Quarry Lake, a deep water pond inside an old quarry.

When they arrived, they saw Bob standing on the highest cliff overlooking the pond. He was wearing what could best be described as a Tarzan swimsuit. The stage was set for

Brave Bob's greatest feat yet. All eyes were on Bob as he dove from the cliff into the cold water fifty feet below.

Today, they still talk about the noise Bob's belly flop made as it loudly echoed off the quarry walls. When he surfaced, Bob's stomach glowed fire engine red, and he was yelling in pain. He had to be helped out of the water, helped out of the quarry, and laid on the ground until someone could take him to the hospital. Bob didn't look very brave now.

After that, Bob didn't take so many chances.

He confessed to his father, "I don't feel so brave anymore."

"I'm not sure you were ever really brave," his father said, angry about the chances Bob had taken with his young life. "Maybe you were just foolish."

Questions

1. Why do think Bob felt the need to show off so much?

2. Does Bob remind you of anyone you know? (No names, please.) In what ways?

3. Are you like Bob in any way? If so, how?

4. Is a person like Bob really brave or is he foolish, like his dad said?

5. At what times is it useful to be brave? Can you give some examples from your own life?

6. What brave people do you respect and why?

7. Did they take unnecessary risks or were the brave things they did necessary to some great cause or reason?

Exercise

Using all of the elements below, write a short story (two or three paragraphs) demonstrating one or more acts of bravery:

1. Tropical island
2. Fishing boat
3. Sharks
4. Palm tree
5. Group of tourists
6. Typhoon
6. Rising water
7. Three fishermen
8. Mudslide
9. Rainbow
10. Fierce winds
11. Rope
12. Life vests

Chapter 16: Don't Give Up!

If they ever wrote a book called "Heroes of Determination," Ellen would be on the cover.

Quite frankly, nothing got in her way. If it did, Ellen either went around it, burrowed under it, crawled over it, or plowed right through it. When the going got tough and the weak got going, Ellen just rolled up her sleeves, dug in her heels, and went for the goal. And let bystanders beware!

But her mastery of stick-to-itiveness didn't come easy. Like most lasting things in life—you know, those things worth keeping—Ellen had to learn the hard way. And when I say hard, I mean rock bottom, everybody duck, look out—here it comes—hard.

By the look of her, Ellen did not seem like much. Frail from birth and tiny, the young girl seemed to have a nervous twitch all the time. She often stuttered when she spoke. To top it off, Ellen just plain didn't know how to dress. When the girls in school dressed up for a party, Ellen wore blue jeans and tennis shoes. And when her friends went to the pool in their swimsuits, Ellen always wore a sweat suit.



"She looks ridiculous," they would whisper behind her back.

"That girl will never amount to anything," others would say, shaking their heads in disbelief at how out of place Ellen always appeared.

But Ellen had one special gift, secret in the beginning but understood by all later on, that would distinguish her from the rest of the pack. A special gift that when thinking about it today, made all of her other "faults" unimportant.

Simply put, Ellen never gave up. That strangely dressed, nervous-looking, stuttering girl so many ridiculed had a will of pure iron when it came to getting things done.

Oh, yes, she heard the negative comments people made about her, but she only took pride in ignoring them and accomplishing the goals she set out for herself. Whenever the insults began, Ellen would think to herself, “Whatever does not kill you can only make you stronger.”

And so it was during her school years. While her friends were concerned with the latest fad in dress or which celebrity was doing what with whom, Ellen was focused on getting good grades, helping her parents around the house, and doing community service work. She never gave up on her goals, even when it seemed all of the kids were turning on her.

You know what? Since some of her community work was reading to little kids at the library, Ellen soon stopped stuttering with all the practice in speaking and pronouncing clearly. Her good grades and her close relationship with her parents gave her self-confidence, and she stopped being nervous. She began to notice, through sheer intelligence, what clothes looked good on her and when to wear them. Instead of seeming small and frail, Ellen now looked petite and pretty. She was blossoming in every way. The kids began to notice all this. Where once they had made fun of her, now they started to admire her. Sometimes kids who were being made fun of would turn to Ellen for help.

They’d ask her, “How did you ignore so much—the insults and the put-downs—and still accomplish so much?”

To which Ellen would reply with a twinkle in her eye, “Never stray too far from the jungle path—you never know what’s out there.”



"What do you mean by that?" they asked.

"I mean, focus on your goals and never give up!" said Ellen.

Questions

1. Do you think Ellen was proud of her gift of determination? Why or why not?

2. Was there a time in your life when you did not give up? Explain.

3. How difficult is it to block insults and put-downs and still focus on the goal? What would you have done in a situation like Ellen's?

4. Are you a good judge of character? If you met Ellen, what would your first reaction have been towards her?

5. Tell about a time that you "gave up," when you stopped trying to make a goal. How did that make you feel? Did you try later to accomplish the same goal?

6. Can you name some people who have become famous for not giving up? Do they have anything in common?

Exercise

Think of some goal you really want to accomplish. Then imagine five obstacles (things that could get in the way) that might prevent you from achieving it. Finally, tell what you would do to overcome each obstacle.

Goal to Accomplish:

Five Obstacles:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

How to Overcome Each Obstacle:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Chapter 17: Learning to Cooperate, the Hard Way

When people first caught a glimpse of Rob, they would label him a loner. You know, someone who always wanted to be left alone. But on the rare occasion that someone made the extreme effort needed to actually get to know him, they would discover that it wasn't so much that Rob was a loner, but that he was driven by the need to prove that he could do everything by himself.

"Hey, Rob, do you need some help carrying that canoe?" someone once asked the short-but-muscular boy as he strained under the weight of the boat.

"No, I do not!" Rob yelled back. "What do I look like, a wimp?"

Rob ended up spending the rest of the day in bed with a sprained back instead of paddling out on the lake.

Another time, someone offered to help Rob paint a shed on his family's farm, but he was quickly turned down.

"Thanks for the offer, but no thanks," said Rob abruptly. "I don't need any help. Why, I can finish painting this thing by lunch all by myself," he boasted, with a broad grin on his face.

Well, it ended up taking Rob almost four days to paint that big old barn. And by the time he was finished, Rob was sore for two weeks. His legs and arms ached, his hands were raw from holding the brushes, and his hair was bright red for weeks.



But for Rob, all the pain, suffering, and wasted time didn't matter. The important thing he was proving to the world was that there wasn't anything he could not accomplish by himself. By accepting help, or even worse, by asking for help, it was as if he were saying,

"I am not good enough to get things done. I give up. I surrender."

Never once did Rob consider that by working with others he could get more done, and better and faster. No way. With Rob, everything was personal. And people accommodated what they called “Rob’s problem” by ignoring him, and never bothering to invite him to do anything with them in groups.

“That would just be a waste of time,” they concluded.

Rob’s state of blissful isolation lasted quite some time. But it was bound to fall apart one day, and it did.

Bob's language arts teacher, Mrs. Jones, announced, “Class, we are going to write and produce our very own play. We will work together and have lots of fun doing it. Won’t that be wonderful?”



Everyone looked at Rob in the back of the class. He seemed agitated at the thought of working together in a group. He was sweating, his face turned red, and he could hardly talk. Big, strong loner Rob had been reduced to near tears.

“I can’t do this. I can’t work in groups. They will just hold me back, get in the way,” Rob half-chokingly blurted out to Mrs. Jones from his safe perch at the back of the class.

“But Rob, we are all going to work together on this project, and that is all there is to it,”

Mrs. Jones said in a firm voice that no one would dare challenge. “Do you have a problem with that?” she asked.

“Who me, have a problem with anything I can’t handle? Of course not,” Rob said, just before the entire class burst out in laughter.

"Don't worry," said one girl cheerfully. "We'll teach you how to accept help!"

"I don't need any help learning to accept help!" said Rob.

"Yes, you do!" countered the girl. "You need help learning to learn that you need to accept help!"

"Huh?" said Rob.

"Never mind," laughed the teacher. "Just—welcome to the class, Rob!"

Questions

1. How do you think Rob did working in a group on his class play?

2. Do you know anyone like Bob? (No names, please!) Are you like him at all?

3. What do you think Rob's teacher meant when she said, "Welcome to the class, Rob!"?

4. Rob is very proud of being able to do things himself. Do you think this is a true or a false pride?

5. Can you name some things that a group cooperating together could accomplish that one individual alone could not possibly do?

6. If you were Rob's friend, what would you do or say to help him consider working with other people?

7. Do you see any relationship between this story and the story in Chapter 3? Compare the two.

Exercise

Below are different kinds of activities relating to farm life, home care, and fishing. Next to the appropriate letter, write how two or more people working together could divide the labor and make the task go better. If it is a task better done by just one individual, write "I" next to it.

A. Cow milking

B. Fence mending

C. Tractor driving

D. Egg collection

E. Putting a new roof on a house

F. Cutting back the branches on a tall tree

G. Washing the kitchen floor

H. Washing the dinner dishes and pots and pans

I. Hanging a picture just right on a wall

J. Getting a boat from where it is pulled up on shore into the water

K. Rowing out to the deep part of a lake

L. Putting worms and other bait on a fish hook

M. Casting the line of the rod out far from the boat

N. Reeling in a fish that has bitten onto the bait

O. Netting the fish and bringing it into the boat

Note: While a few of these tasks really are better done by an individual, it is amazing how many of them can be accomplished more easily and successfully with help from at least one other person.

Hooray for people!