

Danny started first grade like most—nervous, unsure, and looking for a familiar face in a sea of confusion. When we headed out the door, I took one last look at my “little boy” as he stepped out into the world wearing his newly purchased can-I-have-those-everyone-is-wearing-them faded, blue jeans and a backpack so big that brushed the ground as he sauntered to the car parked in the street.

I PICKED UP Danny after school and we stopped at Baskin & Robbins for ice-cream.

“How was school today,” I asked, starting in on my mint chocolate chip.

“Fine dad,” he said through mouthfuls.

“Whatdidyoudo?” I said, prying for more information.

“Played . . . learned. There was one kid I didn’t get along with,” he said looking down at the table.

“That will happen. Not everyone,” I mentioned, “will like you.”

I turned the car off, walked through the door, and listened to the messages on the answering machine.

*Beep.*

“Hello. This is Miss Saumers from Highland Elementary. I wanted to talk to you about a little trouble that went on at school today. Give me a call. 503-284-8988.”

*Beep.*

“Hey son,” I said, walking out into the living room, “what’s this about a little trouble at school?”

Danny thought. “When William—the kid I was telling you about—went to play on the playground, he hit me.”

“Did you talk to William about it? Did you tell a teacher?” I asked, bothered that this was going on at school.

“William said he was sorry,” my son slowly said. “It was an accident.”

The next day there was another phone message from the school; this time asking me to give the teacher a call at 12:35.

“Danny,” I yelled from the kitchen, “come here.”

“What’s up doc?”

“Danny,” I started, a little surprised from how he addressed me, “your teacher has called again. It’s cool how much she cares for her students. I won’t be able to call her today like she wants. Will you give this note to her for me?” Danny looked down and then at the door while his mother chimed in, a voice from down the hall, “What’s going on at school?”

“You bet, buddy.”

The first week of school passed quickly. Danny had a rough start with the taunting and jeering of William. Everyday Danny would share a new story about what William did: “Today he put paste on Suzy’s chair”; “He threw food at lunch because he was mad”; “He was sent back to the end of the line for tripping students.” All week it was like a mini-drama. I couldn’t wait to meet this kid and his parents after school at the pick up spot. With regards to children, I often found that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

I tried once more the next day to contact the teacher and thank her for trying to get a hold of me each day this week. A school open house is tomorrow so I figured I would touch bases with the teacher then.

At the open house, I scanned the room for William’s parents. I did not know what to look for, but was certain I would know them when I saw them. “I wonder where they are,” I said to my wife in hushed tones.

“They’ll be here,” was her reply. “After all the hassle he has caused, they would have to show up if only to say sorry.”

No one looked out of place. Everyone was happily talking and looking at drawings on the wall.

“We’ve been excited to meet you,” my wife and I said, hands extended.

“Danny is a unique child,” Miss Saumers said with a smile.

“Well, he certainly has been having fun. He talks about school every day.”

“I’m sure that he has,” said Miss Saumers. “I’ve been trying to reach you about—”

“Yes. Thanks. I have told my wife about how impressed I am with how much you care about your students.”

“We do, at Highland Elementary,” said Miss Saumers. “That is why I wanted to contact you. Danny’s start this year was hard. It was a little rough.”

“Danny’s flexible,” I said. “he can adjust to just about anything, although the incident with William was hard.”

“I bet you have your hands full with William,” my wife interjected.

“William?” said Miss Saumers with a puzzled look. “There isn’t anyone named William in first grade.”