

Visiting Connor

I thought I had come up with a great idea. It is winter in Ohio, and I am retired, so I shared my great idea with my four grandsons. I would spend a day at each one of their schools, meet their friends and observe their classes. Dan, the 17 year-old senior just looked at me...and asked if I had finished the recommendation for college that I was writing for him. Andrew, the 15 year-old sophomore, said that that would be “cool”, but later told his mother that he would be embarrassed to have me following him around and didn't think that this was a good idea. Connor, the 10 year-old fourth grader said that he liked the idea and that he would check with his teacher and principal to see if my visit would be all right. Austin, the 8 year-old second grader said that he would have to think about it, but later told his mother that his friends would think it was funny to have his grandfather sitting in class all day. My good idea had hit a snag, so I didn't say any more about it.

About a week later on a Saturday morning, at Connor's piano recital, he jumped up on my lap and said he had spoken to his teacher and principal and everything was set for my visit. He suggested that I visit that following Monday morning. I said that I couldn't make Monday, but that I could come on Wednesday. He said to show up at 11:15, 15 minutes before lunch and that he would take care of all of the details. I said that I would be there.

On Tuesday night, he called to make sure I was coming and said that he was very excited about my visit. I said, “Are you sure that me coming won't embarrass you?” and he said, “Why would that embarrass me, I'm proud of you.” I said I would be there. After hanging up the phone, and after swallowing the lump in my throat, and after revising my will, I got my camera ready for the next day. I also laid out a big bag of “red hots” that I had in my study to pass around at snack time.

Connor is a very interesting young boy. He was ranked number 1 in Ohio in BMX racing when he was 6, and as he has entered elementary school he has excelled in gymnastics and piano. He has done so well that he was selected to go to a special school for academics and the performing arts. He is always very upbeat and helpful.

On Wednesday, I arrived at the school at 11:45 and walked down the hallway toward Connor's room. The teacher saw me and said, “ Are you Con-

nor's grandpa?" and motioned me into the room. She said, "Connor, introduce your guest to everyone." Connor stood up and said, "This is my grandpa. His name is Glenn, but you can call him Mr. Saltzman." They applauded and said, "Hi Grandpa" or "Hi Mr. Saltzman." I sat down and the class continued. The teacher walked over to me during a break and said, "Do anything you want to do while you are here...take pictures, walk around and see what the kids are doing, join us in discussions or just watch. You are our guest and we want you to feel at home." That welcome was unlike most of the classrooms I have visited in my life and I was starting to see already why Connor comes out of school every day saying, "I love to go to this school!" Mrs. Heffernan announced it was time to go to lunch and I got in line. She said Connor could walk me down to the cafeteria, but I said I would stay in line...because I was here for the whole experience!

We went through the cafeteria line and I got a chef's salad and Connor got pizza. We joined two of Connor's friend at a table for four. He introduced me and told them that I had been a professor at a medical school and a naval officer. I didn't even know he knew that. The two boys, one blonde and big and the other black haired and small told me that they were twins. I asked what their father did and they told me that they didn't know their father because their mother had gone to a sperm bank and selected them. They explained that they were twins, but had different fathers! They seemed unfazed by what they were telling me and I only hope that my mouth didn't drop too far open. We played a game of Othello, a game that the directions explained, "that you can learn in a minute, but will take a lifetime to master." The non-identical/ non-fraternal twins scorched us!

Next we went to vocal class, where I was introduced to the fifth graders and they warmed up by singing a three-part drill using the words "Good Grandpa" to the class's smiles and great joy. They were so good that I felt very moved when they sang a new song about not judging people by the color of their skin. I wasn't alone because the teacher said, "You guys are doing a wonderful job today." One fifth-grader turned to me and said, "She says that every day." Connor was asked to explain the order that sharps and flats have on the scale. I played the clarinet for ten years and hadn't even known that they had a special order! As we left the class the teacher whispered to me, "Connor is a great little boy." I was starting to sense that every kid in this school was "a great kid" and because they heard it so often, they tried to live up to it in every thing they did. What a wonderful way to learn

and what a wonderful way to treat our fellow passengers on this spaceship Earth.

Back to homeroom to finish the “dream catchers” and to hear a story about an Indian grandpa who was teaching his blind grandson to deal with life. We all sat on the floor and half way through the story, Mrs. Haffernan stopped and said, “Do you notice any thing special about this story?” Three fourths of the hands went up, and I nearly fainted when she called on one child and he said, “ There seem to be more similes in this story than in most of the stories you read us.” Everyone agreed, and while I was hoping she wouldn’t call on me to describe several similes, the class rattled off about six of seven that they had heard. I was shooting some pictures and a little girl said, “get your camera ready, she normally cries when she reads this kind of story.” When she didn’t cry, one of the boys asked her why and she said she was “holding it back.” He said it had almost made him cry...and no one laughed at him. Carl and Ron would have laughed at me in the fourth grade if I had said that my favorite story, My Friend Flicka, made me cry!

After identifying ten types of rocks and finishing their math homework and spending one half-hour in the library picking out a new book (on which a report would be due), it was time to tidy up the room and go home. I asked Mrs. H. if I could share my snack and she said yes. I told Connor that I had brought a snack. He said, “Is it a grandma snack or a grandpa snack?” I knew that that meant that hers would be something wonderful and mine would be something that I had purchased. He grunted when I said it was a grandpa snack, but helped me pass those “red hots” out to his classmates. Everyone said thank you, and no one took more than the suggested two or three.

On the way to the car, I told him how proud I was of him and how much I loved being with him for the day. He said, “ Thank you very much for coming...not every kid gets to have their grandpa visit them.” The tears welled up in my eyes when he said that, and as I write this. I am so happy for the excitement he feels about learning so many new things. I am happy that he is learning about respect and love from teachers and friends whom he respects and loves. The lump in my throat returned the next day when he called me to say that his friends thought I was “really nice.” Some things are going right in this world. I wish more folks could spend a day at their kid’s or grandkid’s school and come away feeling the excitement and pride and love that I felt

that day. I wish every child could experience a school like Connor's and every grandparent could have grandsons like ours.

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