

DOWN THE SLIDE

by Ken Bradbury



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A well-known educator tells the story about his daughter, Katie's, first day of Kindergarten. He says, "Katie hardly slept the night before, filled with the excitement of her first day of school. We both rose at five to make sure we had at least two hours to pick out just the right shorts and blouse, rearrange her book bag for the fifth time, and carefully write her name on each pencil, eraser, and crayon. Katie had looked forward to school since the day she was born and today was the day!"

"I must admit that it was a day more filled with anxiety for me than for my little daughter. The hours seemed to creep by as I waited for the school bus to return my young scholar."

"The bus stopped in front of our house in northern Utah and a bedraggled little figure slowly came down the steps, across the yard and in the front door."

"'Katie!,' I shouted, 'How was it! How was school! Tell me about it!'"

"Katie looked up at me with the eyes of a forlorn puppy. 'Okay' she grunted."

"'What? What happened? Who was your teacher?'"

“She looked at me, sniffed and mumbled ‘Mrs. Brown.’ This was not going well. In the space of two weeks it became ‘Old Mrs. Brown.’ Then after the first six weeks it was ‘Ugly old Mrs. Brown,’ and at the end of the first semester her kindergarten teacher had become ‘Fat old ugly Mrs. Brown.’ What could I do? This was the first year of my first daughter’s first experience with public education. I made my living by writing books on how to educate and motivate children, and now I was faced with a daughter who was ready to give up school entirely and join the Peace Corps at age five!

“We made it through that first year ... somehow. I don’t know who wanted the year to end more ... Katie or me. Finally the last day of school arrived and when the bus stopped in front of our ranch I saw a bubbly, joyous Katie literally jump off the bus. ‘How was school today, Katie?’”

“‘Oh daddy, it was wonderful! It was awesome! Mrs. Brown was so cool!’”

“I thought to myself, ‘Mrs. Brown? What happened to fat, old, ugly?’”

“‘Why, Katie?’ I asked. ‘What did Mrs. Brown do?’”

“‘Oh Daddy, it was the last day of school so Mrs. Brown wore jeans today! And she went down the slide with us!’”

I smiled ... With deep regret. What a difference, I thought, it would have made in Katie’s life and in the life of

Mrs. Brown's first year of teaching, if she had only felt free to be herself. Just be herself.

An incident that got national attention in the Christmas of 1989 involved a small grade school in the Midwest. A third grade teacher had given the class the assignment: Write a Theme on "What you Want to Be When You Grow Up."

The usual assortment of fireman, nurse, doctor, and teacher themes were handed in on the following Monday. Only one little boy was asked to do his assignment again. He had apparently misunderstood the assignment. His theme began: "When I grow up I want to be myself."

He continued, "People who are real have the most the fun, I think. When I grow up I want to be real. My daddy is real. Sometimes he kids me and stuff, but mostly he's real. I like that."

He was asked to do the assignment again with an admonition by the teacher, "I don't think you understood the assignment. I mean, "What do you *really* want to be?"

The boy obediently re-wrote his assignment. He began with "When I grow up I want to work for a store, I guess. I really don't know."

God forbid he would wish for anything as world-shattering as simply being himself.

Even a well-known CEO of the computer world says, "We have enough computer programmers. Send me dreamers."



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