

A LITTLE PATIENCE
AND
A BIG SECRET

A Children's Story

© Paul R. Carr (2006)

“Dada, tell us a story of when you were small,” the two little girls asked their father.

They always called him Dada, not Dad, not Daddy, not Pop, not Father, not anything else.

They didn't have to ask him twice to tell them a story because they knew, as all little girls and boys know, that their Dada loved to tell them stories, and what he loved most was when his little girls sat with him, wide-eyed, their mouths open, hugging and playing with him, and telling him, in the most challenging voice possible, “That's not true!”, and then following it up with, “Is it?”.

Well, sometimes, as a Dada, you say things to your little girls that might be just a teensy-weensy bit different from the actual, real story. You might add a little something, and change the actual colour and sound and image of the story just a little. You might even try to make the story more fantastic and impressive and enormous than it really was.

What's important, and what all little girls and boys know, is that being a little girl or boy is a very special thing.

Why, you might ask? And you might also ask, where's that story?

Well, it's a special time because, uummmhh, because you're small, and you can play, and almost everything you learn is really fun, and you aren't bothered by going to work, and you get invited to lots of parties and celebrations, and, usually, hopefully, magically, all of the little children of the world have big people who love them.

Who loves them?, they asked with the same curiosity of a happy little guinea pig named Nibbles who is about to greet a fluffy, crunchy, bowl of bright orange carrots. Nibbles had a little baby named appropriately Guinea that was every colour of the rainbow, and she would try to bury herself under Nibbles whenever big people were around.

“I'm glad you asked. Who loves you? Well, there are dads and moms, and aunts and uncles, and granddads and grandmas, and lots of other family and friends, and everyone, just plain everyone, loves children. Even dogs and cats, and fish and ferrets and rabbits and gerbils and fuzzy little guinea pigs, and birds, and horses, and pigs, everyone and everything.” this Dada whispered to his little girls.

“Is that true?” The obvious question sifted from the lips of the younger daughter, a beautiful, cherubish peach of love, always smiling, and who carried the innocent and playful name of Julia.

“Well, I'm glad you asked because that answer is not so easy but let's just say that children make us alive, and when children are happy big people are be happy too,” came the measured response from Dada, knowing that more questions were coming, but also knowing that it is sometimes as necessary to give challenging, thoughtful answers to your children as it is to give those which may be a little too simple and easy. After all, being a child is about growing up, about playing

and learning, about testing the waters, about going to school and doing something new every single day, not about being told not to dream.

Why do some children not have all that they need, and some are sick, and others are hungry, and some don't have toys, and others don't have a mom or dad, and some just want to be hugged? Why? Why? And why?

Why should that one over there be a princess with vacations and fancy electronic games and sumptuous dinner-parties and tickets to the theatre when that one over here only sees her parents once in a while, eats processed cheese-slices every day, never goes out, even to the movies, and only gets a new pair of out-of-date runners once a year, to start school, and to face a another year of tough grades and tougher kids.

“We all want to be hugged, and all of the beautiful, little children, you are the ones who will make this world a better place. What, how, where, when, why... what's going on here? You heard me, you children are going to make this a better place,” Dada explained to them, as they sat there waiting, a little less patiently, to hear the story, but now somewhat restless, talking about needing to go to the bathroom, wanting to check on Nibbles, needing a drink of water, really anything.

An idle question here: when should one attempt to measure the attention-span of chirpish little girls?

“Please tell us just one way that it will be better when we are no longer children,” the eldest daughter, an undeniably cute, bright-eyed, extremely thoughtful girl much wiser than her ten years, named so sweetly Camille, pronounced either in English and French, challenged the still-bubbly Dada.

“That will happen, and you will do it, and all of the children that are sad and hungry and poor, we will help them,” was the response, which really didn't respond to the question, but led into another series of queries.

“How can we do that? How can we do anything? We are just kids!” they both chimed in, not in exasperation but with intrigue and love, at least that's how Dada saw it. He thought the fact that the conversation had lasted this long, without getting to the real story at hand, was worthy of a big kiss for both.

“I will tell you a secret but you have to promise me that you will never forget it, and that you will say it to yourselves everyday.”

“And then the story, Dada,” the youngest daughter pleaded.

And then the eldest daughter said, with the utter clarity and brilliance she always demonstrated,

“Dada, can I play nintendo?”

“And here is the secret of life, my precious little clumps of sparkling waffles slathered in whip cream and maple syrup, the reason I live, my darling babies. It is all about, listen now,” as he clasped his hands around his mouth to control the wisdom he only found after searching for decades, “and remember this forever, it is all about, ... are you ready?”

“Yes, please just tell us now,” they asked frantically.

“My little sugar plums, it is all about, please don’t forget this,” he prolonged the affair, “it is all about sharing.”

“I know that sharing is good from Sparks,” the little one offered. Nothing gets by her.

In a deep reflective tone the eldest asked, “And what happens if we don’t share?”

“If we don’t share, then we are not here, and we do not breath, and if one of us needs a hand, who will give it if we don’t share? Sharing is what makes us us, what makes us special, what makes all of the little beautiful children our special little treats. Because little children share, and they like to share, and they need to share, and never, ever once do they not share because a child is different, only if they think that child is not nice.”

“Think about it”, Dada gently coddled the children, “and as we all grow older we will talk about sharing, sharing everything.”

“Even the big houses with swimming pools and fire-places?,” Julia proposed.

“And what if the people in the big houses with swimming pools and fire-places do not want to share?,” Camille dissected the conversation with her usual insight.

“These are good questions, and the answer is that we must share, and not sharing will not make all of the children happy,” Dada seemed content with this theme, but also seemed perplexed as to why, if it is the only way to live, then why do so very few actually live that way.

“Is there a story tonight, Dada,” the little one brought everything back to reality.

“Did you know that before J.K. Rowlings, even before Robert Munch, two great people who have tantalized and enthralled children all over the world, there was one Saint-Antoine Exupery, who gave us *Le petit prince*,” Dada invoked.

“*Le petit prince* is one of the greatest books ever written, a classic, read by young and old, filled with landscapes and images and colours and lots of earth-shattering concepts, like adults having no imagination,” Dada truly loved *Le petit prince*.

“And do you know why I love *Le petit prince* so much?” he asked his two little gleamingly glazed chestnuts, brimming with rocky-road ice cream and covered with caramel and chocolate. “Well, I read that book, that wonderful collection of words and pictures, that beautifully, intricate story, when I was a young man, lost and searching, stumbling and stammering, in France, in French, and when I think about that period, that was it, that was really it.”

“What was it?” Camille questioned her Dada.

“Well, I could see, and I could smell, the wonderful *merguez* sausages being seared on the streets of Paris, and I can still hear the sounds. I was awake and alive and ready to change the world, even to share.”

“Just because they speak French doesn’t make them special,” the little one retorted.

“Well, it kind of does because the French language is so rich and beautiful and full of great poetry, and France has graced the world with art and culture and lots of creamy, glistening, savory pastry.”

“But English is also special,” a riveted Camille responded, as if to say that they were also special, even though they spoke French with a sweet-sounding accent that made you want to hum along.

“Of course, English is extremely special, and not only because you speak English, but every language is special. Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, Arabic, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and all of the other languages are all special.”

“But the Simpsons are only in English,” the little one offered, as a way of saying that only English has that mass-market appeal.

“Well, it could be that the Simpsons were created in English. But who created them? Maybe it was people from different cultures who didn’t originally speak English?”

“Anyway, when you travel, one day, you will meet the secret of sharing what you have learned with other people who may not understand your language but will understand the look in your eyes”.

“Do you mean we won’t talk to them, just look at them,” Julia chimed in.

“Oh no, you will certainly talk to them, but they will already know lots about you by the way you talk even if they don’t understand you,” Dada reasoned.

He looked around, surmised a bit, and then said, “Did I ever tell you about the time I played

hockey all day and all night?”

“Only about fifty times. How about another one?” the older child requested.

“Was that the one when you ate and ate and ate?” the little one asked.

“Indeed, that is the one. I’ll tell you what, I’ll tell you the story of me being small, and playing hockey, and eating and eating and eating, and then I’ll tell you something entirely new, about when I moved to France, and couldn’t speak French,” Dada offered.

“That’s O.K. with us but can we get a cookie before we start?” the little one suggested.

They toddled off like happy little penguins, rummaging through the cupboards, collecting their cookies, and then re-positioning themselves on both sides of their dad.

“Well, I remember, I was eight years old, and I was a good little boy, I think,” Dada commenced the story, finally.

“I liked lots of things. Collecting stamps, watching the Flinstones, eating macaroni and cheese, bugging my brothers and sisters, playing with the dog, not going to school in the Summer, and lots of stuff. But the one thing I loved, well I really loved it, it was playing hockey.”

“There was no hockey season for this little eight-year old because I played hockey the whole year long. I played on ice when I could, and I played on the road when I could, and I watched it on television when I could, and I even started reading the newspaper to find out more about the best game around. I cherished my hockey stick, and I would polish my hockey skates almost every day.”

“Well, that’s not much of a story,” Camille, again, so perceptively questioned the wisdom of her dada.

“Well, my happy, little *boules de neige*,” Dada lovingly added, “this story does get more exciting.”

“Dada, you’re not going to make us watch hockey with you, or something like that?,” the perky little Julia asked so innocently.

“There is no fear of that. Let me continue with the best part,” Dada interjected.

“Let’s just say that I was obsessed with hockey, and this one day, when it was extremely cold out, I mean really cold, and this was back in the 1960s when we had snow, long before all of the things you learn in school about the climate changing and pollution flooding our environment was ever thought of. So I put on my long underwear, and my pants, and my snow pants, and two sweaters and a big, puffy jacket that made me look like the Pop’N’Fresh Doughboy, and I also

put on ear-muffs, a hat, a scarf over my face, a pair of comfy gloves and then my hockey gloves, and I also put on two pairs of thick, White socks and my boots,” Dada signed after finishing that description.

“I was ready, I was really ready, and no one was going to stop me”.

“Why would anyone stop an eight-year old boy from playing hockey,” Camille asked, as always, trying to point out the obvious.

“Did I ever tell you that in *Le Petit Prince*, the little magical prince stated that adults have no imagination,” Dada asked his effervescent, gleaming milkduds.

“You didn’t, but I can see why he said it,” the eldest daughter responded.

“I like the story,” the younger daughter countered.

“Well, after spending about an hour getting dressed, I headed out the door to play road hockey in the freezing cold with a tennis ball that felt like a rock when it hit you. How I loved to run up and down the street, bouncing the ball off fire hydrants and lampposts, jostling off front lawns, weaving through the sidewalk, generally loving every minute, and we passed the ball front and back, side to side, over and under. We loved our game of hockey”.

“Is that it?” Camille started to get up.

“But why would you run on people’s grass?” the little one blurted out, clearly intrigued, at least more than her big sister.

“You see, we started to play at nine o’clock in the morning, and at noon some of the moms and dads yelled out to their children to come in to eat lunch. Some of them even sad that they prepared nice tomato soup, with a ham sandwich, and chocolate chip cookies, and hot chocolate. On a freezing cold day, that was a very good thing,” Dada told his little girls, kissing both on their foreheads.

“Martha Stewart says that it’s a good thing,” Camille, the obvious social conscience in the group, added.

“Well, I don’t know about Martha Stewart but I continued to play, even when my mom, your nana, yelled out, ‘Stevie, it’s time for lunch, it’s time to come in for lunch’”.

“There was no way on Earth that I was going to be dislodged from that game so I waved and said I would be in a minute but kept on playing and playing and playing.”

“Dada, I think I hear the guinea pigs. I better feed them right away,” Julia astutely inserted, still seeking a way to undertake her grandiose plan of popcorn and a video, the same Happy Gilmour

for the fifth time in two days.

“*Mon bébé*, you wouldn’t want to miss the rest of this story, would you?,” Dada asked his beautiful little caramel-soaked sponge-cake.

“Well, is that a question?,” she questioned her dad.

“Let’s plod on, *mes deux belles poupées*. So, I continued to play, and it was cold, and it was frosty, chilly, red-cheeked Winter out there, and all I could think about was scoring another goal. And I scored one, and then another, and then another,” he sighed, hugged his girls, and then prepared for the end.

“Well, the reason I was scoring so many goals is that half of the kids playing left with their frosty, chilly, red-cheeked Winter head-colds to jump into their jammies and drink hot chocolate and cuddle with their little puppies, kittens and guinea pigs in front of the t.v., nice and toasty-like, with all of the love and kindness and silky-soft special blanky comfort you could imagine. Well I continued to play and play, and then,” Dada took a deep breath, at which point the little one interjected.

“Dada, when can we go get some of the cuddly, silky chocolate, and put on our jammies, and get those little pigs down here in our arms, and make sure that they’re not too crusty and freezing and whatever else you said,” the little one asked.

“*Alors, mes bébés*, indeed, go put on your jammies, go get your little guinea pigs, and I will make you some hot chocolate,” Dada said in the softest, most loving tone possible to his two little love-birds.

The story was not so much a story but it was, for two princesses and one dada, not to forget a very happy guinea pig, a special moment. Together.

THE END