

# Wonderkidz

How to ZOOM Your Child's Intelligence!

By Marshall Kaminsky

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Marshall Kaminsky

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Dear Parents:

You bought this book because the idea of having very smart and capable children intrigued you. If this is what you want, you will not be disappointed. If you have the right attitude, learn the simple methodologies presented, and make the necessary time and effort commitment, your children will develop an intellect far superior to yours, or 99.99% of the rest of the world -- that's a promise.

Let me start by quoting a passage from the book *Kindergarten Is Too Late* by Masaru Ibuka, the late co-founder of the Sony Corporation in Japan. This quote sums up the substance of what Wonderkidz is all about.

***“From birth to three are the key years for developing your child’s intelligence -- don’t wait ‘til kindergarten!”***

Wonderkidz is the name of both this how-to book and the seminar the author presents that teaches parents:

- X How to raise extremely intelligent and capable children
- X How to become better teachers than they already are
- X How to teach their toddlers how to really read and compute
- X And so much more

It has long been thought that human beings are born with a certain fixed and unchangeable amount of intelligence. That thinking has dramatically changed.

With magnetic resonance imaging devices mapping brain growth with tots and toddlers, scientists have conclusively proved otherwise. **Early environmental stimulation has a profound effect on an individual's ultimate level of intelligence.** The debate of nature versus nurture has finally been settled; both heredity and the environment contribute.

Now things really get interesting. We are all products of normal environmental stimulation. But what happens if early childhood stimulation far exceeds what is now considered normal? ***What happens is phenomenal brain growth and development.*** In a nutshell, excess stimulation acts as a super brain catalyst. It has been said that presently we only use a paltry 10-20% of our brain power. Now we have the means to use much more. This phenomena ranks as one of the most stirring and far reaching of human discoveries and is one that will forever change the landscape of humanity.

Providing that excess stimulation is what the Wonderkidz book and seminar is all about. The Wonderkidz program differs widely from the established thinking. ***First, we believe the very best and most powerful brain stimulation is reading!*** Accordingly, we strongly recommend that parental reading instruction begin as soon as children learn how to talk and Wonderkiz teaches parents how. Parents even learn how to teach their little ones phonics at the same time they are learning the alphabet! Wonderkidz may be a program that starts with infants, but it is anything but infantile.

Wonderkidz is written so that most any parent can understand its easy step-by-step approach. As a parent, I wrote it to teach other parents what I know

about this exciting new world. I certainly did not write it to impress them with incomprehensible educational jargon.

The material appears in the format of an on-line conversation between this author, Marsh (M) and Patty2kids (P), a fictional mother of two children who lives in San Francisco. Erica is 16 months and Mickey 8 years old. The inspiration for this format came from the many delightful hours I have spent communicating with mothers on America-On-Line. The spelling and grammar used in on line chats is often abysmal. To project authenticity, this book often takes liberties with the English language.

Patty represents a composite of the many mothers I have talked to at my early learning seminars, on the telephone or on line. She is a concerned mother who has picked up on America's miserable educational system. Like this author, she doesn't want to idly sit by and hope and pray that her children get a good education. That won't do for this feisty mother. Patty wants to stack the deck for her children.

Some cyberspace lingo and symbols used:

:o)	Smile
:o(	Frown
LOL:	Laughing outloud.
LMAO:	Laughing my ass off!
ZZZZ:	Snoring -- "I'm getting bored."
ALL CAPS:	Shouting
Hmmmm.	Thinking
u	You
r	Are

Author's note

There are many references to books and teaching aides. For details, readers should refer to the Appendix at the end of the book.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTELLIGENCE: HOW SMART ARE WE?

Marsh and Patty have chatted on line for several months in an America-On-Line chat room before the having the following conversation:

P. Marsh, you ought to write a book on education. It would be a smash hit with parents.

M. I have thought about that...but it's not so easy. I am already writing a novel that's a huge pain in the butt.

P. Oh...what's it about?

M. It's a romance about a lady with Multiple Sclerosis and how she fights a bunch of bad guys and changes the world. You could say it's about empowering people with disabilities.

P. Is it because u have MS?

M. That's partly the reason. But there is a lot of other stuff in there besides MS like murder and romance and consumer advocacy stuff.

P. I never noticed! Hahahahaha.

M. Would u like to help me write a book on education?

P. Sure, I'll help. Sounds like great fun. What do you want from me?

M. Just let me teach you everything I know about preschool education. I'll then record and organize our conversations and turn it all into a book.

P. What will I learn?

M. Just how to teach Erica how to read and compute. Does that appeal to you?

P. Really Marsh!!! Erica is just 16 months old!

M. That's the very best time to start teaching her the alphabet and the sounds of the letters.

P. You are kidding me. I cannot believe this. 16 months!!

M. I never kid about such matters. You are vastly underestimating what little kids can learn. The alphabet is a snap for 'em.

P. Marsh, you told me last week that most educators in America think your ideas are all wrong, and that you know better.

M. That's true.

P. Are you are telling me that the combined wisdom of a zillion educators are wrong and you are right?

M. Yes, that's what I am telling you.

P. Isn't that just a little presumptuous on your part? Face it, Marsh, who are you to make such a claim? Why should parents buy your book and listen to you?

M. That's a fair question. Maybe it's because I know what I'm talking about.

P. I see that you are quite sure of yourself.

M. You bet I am. Patty, I personally lived this teaching adventure for about five years. I didn't learn about it from a book. No one can tell me I don't know my stuff, particularly educators who have never taught reading to a two year old themselves.

P. But you have no degrees in education.

M. True. But what gave u the notion that one needs a degree to teach? Heck...teaching is a cinch and from what I've learned about our educational system, the last thing I needed was a degree in education. Because I do

not have one, I never had the misfortune of learning all their nonsense and baloney. Most of what I've learned about teaching came from actually doing it over a long period of time. Anyway, did Einstein have a degree in physics when he discovered the theory of relativity?

P. I don't know...did he?

M. No, he did not. Now I am not comparing myself to him, but there are many people who have done great things without having a degree of any kind.

P. Marsh, I think I am going to enjoy listening to what you have to say.

M. Good, cause what I have to say, you will never hear anywhere else. This book will be an original from start to finish. Moreover, if you do what I tell you, Erica's life will be vastly improved.

P. Aren't you worried about being criticized?

M. Hahaha. Hardly. Patty, I am at a place in my life now that nothing or no one scares me. That's another benefit of having MS and being in a wheelchair.

P. You never told me that you were in a wheelchair!! A benefit?

M. In a sense having MS is very liberating because it makes you so miserable that you forget about all of life's little crap and frees you to focus on what's important. Plus, all the little things I used to fear suddenly disappeared. MS changed my entire perspective on life. That's why I don't give a hoot about being criticized. What can anyone do or say to me that the MS has not already done?

***LATER***

P. Hi, Marsh...I was thinking today how unusual it is that you are writing this book and not someone in education.

M. I have that thought all the time. But I have to write it because no one else will.

P. Why not?

M. Two reasons. The first is that few educators really understand any of this or its importance. Two, the ones who understand it consider it a worse threat than vouchers or home schooling combined so they won't talk. Don't ask why now. I will explain it all later in a later chapter. Okay?

P. Grumble grumble...

M. Now, can I ask u... would it bother you if your kids end up smarter -- I mean MUCH smarter than you? And will u stop grumbling?

P. Silly question. My best girlfriend in high school had a six digit IQ. Disgustingly smart. Never studied, aced every exam. Got a full four year scholarship to Harvard. Worse, she was drop dead gorgeous. Damn, did I envy her!

M. Then it would not bother you?

P. MARSH! Those are my kids you are talking about. I would be overjoyed if they were that smart. I am not competing with my children in the brain department! I want them to be as smart and well educated as possible. That's why I am here. And I will grumble all I want to. So stick that in ur ear. :o)

M. Then you are here for the right reasons.

P. Then let's start. Incidentally, I talked to my sister Ellen... I swear she almost laid an ostrich egg when I told her about these lessons. She bent my ear for an hour telling me why I shouldn't do it . . . that it was a waste of my time . . . that I will be hurting Erica and yadda yadda yadda. She about collapsed and croaked when I said you were a CPA. That really put her in orbit!

M. Huh? What's her interest in all this?

P. I don't think I ever mentioned to u that she has a doctorate in early childhood education....sorry.

M. Hmmm. I should have warned you not to talk to anyone about these lessons. Did you tell anyone else? *Just what I need...a fuzzy head on my ass.*

P. Bill and I told our mothers which means that the whole world now knows about it.

M. I am glad that your sister hasn't scared you away.

P. Not a chance of that happening. I have to hear all u have to say. Plus our mothers are intrigued.

M. That figures...grandparents are usually very interested. Much more so than parents.

P. Oh yeah? Now why is that?

M. I think it's because they have lived long enough to learn the importance of a good education, and that's what they dearly want for their grandchildren. Moving right along...today I snail-mailed you a series of articles about the human brain that ran a few years ago in the Chicago Tribune. The auther, Ron Kotulak, won a Pulitzer for it. Now let's talk about intelligence. What

would you say if I told you that Erica could have an IQ of 200 or higher -- way above genius?

P. *200 yipes!* Still listening . . .

M. It is now firmly established that human intelligence is a factor of both our heredity and the environment. The heredity factor gives all of us a wide range of potential intelligence which means that babies born without birth defects can grow up having an IQ of anywhere between 80 and 200...from dull to super genius or even more than that. The fact is, no one knows the ultimate human intelligence potential. But it is known that it is far higher than the norm today.

P. That's quite a range. From dull to super genius. You are telling me that Erica has a potential IQ of 200?

M. Yes I am. The question is, how much of Erica's potential intelligence will be tapped into? The answer is that it all depends on her environment during her first five years of life. That's where you and Bill enter this picture. For the first years of Erica's life, **YOU** are her environment.

P. How do you define environment?

M. Let's say that right after Erica was born you put her in a dark closet . . . never talked to or touched her. What do you think would happen?

P. That's obvious. I'd get arrested for child neglect and I suppose she'd end up pretty dull.

M. Exactly. That closet would afford her little, if any, brain stimulation. Her brain growth would be stunted. Now consider what happens if Erica gets tons of stimulation a day. Everyone talks to her, touches and hugs her, teaches her to read and compute and she listens to hours and hours of classical music. Now what?

P. Genius?

M. Quite possibly, yes. Thus, you and Bill control her ultimate IQ by the kind of environment you create. Would you want Erica to be a great scientist or an accomplished world class musician?

P. Not sure.

M. Judit Polgar's father was sure about what he wanted.

P. Who's she?

M. A Hungarian girl who trounced world chess champion Boris Spassky when she was just 16. Her astounding accomplishment was no mere accident. According to news accounts, her father believed that high intelligence could be created and he began to teach chess to Judit and her two sisters when they were three years old. Had he stressed music instead, as Mozart's and Beethoven's fathers did, Judit would no doubt be a great musician today. It's the same with Tiger Wood's father. He wanted Tiger to be a great golfer and started teaching him to putt when he was one year old. The point is...whatever we teach 'em during the first few crucial years of their life becomes locked into their minds.

M. I'll bet you've never forgotten Mary Has a Little Lamb or Jack and Jill, have you?

P. Nope. I know them all.

M. And how old were you when you learned them?

P. Probably 3 or 4.

M. That's the whole point. The earlier you learn, the more the brain soaks it up.

P. But they can learn the skills later...learning does not stop just because they turn 5.

M. True, but it's not the same. Whatever is learned early makes later mastery of the subject a whole lot easier. Can u see how parents can control their children's destinies? This is crucial for u to understand. Want someone else's high brow thoughts on this matter?

P. Sure.

M. Commenting on child prodigies such as Mozart, William Fowler (University of Chicago), in his "Longitudinal Study of Early Stimulation in the Emergence of Cognitive Precocity" Fowler wrote:

*"In no instance where documentation exists have I found any individual of high ability who did not experience intensive (emphasis added) early stimulation as a central component of his development . . . The unvarying coincidence of extensive early stimulation with cognitive precocity and subsequent superior competence in adulthood suggests that stimulation is a*

*necessity for the  
development of high  
abilities."*

P. What was all that again? Ye gads, simple English please.

M. Fowler just said he never found a true genius who didn't have intensive early instruction and stimulation.

P. So if I want Erica to be a champion chess player, I should get her started on the game now, while she's still very young.

M. Yes. As a parent, you are in charge. You can mold her as you wish.

P. Got it.

M. Parents need not raise our kids under the "whatever will be, will be" philosophy. Parents can decide what will be -- we are in control! **PARENTS HAVE THAT POWER!!!**

P. *The guy sure gets hysterical about this.* What about her teachers?

M. They are not around during the crucial early years when her brain is rapidly growing, but you are. That

makes you a lot more important. Put another way, teachers are building on the foundation you laid.

P. <----- FEELING EMPOWERED!!!!!!!. Are you sure about all this? Ellen says that trying to make my kids smart your way is ungodly, unnatural, and developmentally incorrect.

M. It is interesting she would bring God into this. Want me to rebut her now?

P. Not now. Tomorrow night. Patty2kids is pooping out.

M. Okay -- tomorrow -- g'night Patty.

P. G'night, Marsh.

### **NEXT EVENING**

P. Hi! I'm here again!

M. Right on time.

P. Marsh, u r sure big on 'lil kids...I appreciate that...

M. You betcha I am. Let me give you an example of their amazing learning abilities, one you have seen but don't fully appreciate. English is a difficult complex language yet little kids learn it without the benefit of

teachers or classrooms. Just by listening, they learn the language in no time and also learn the correct accent.

P. I've noticed.

M. Can any adult do that in the same time period? What's more, that same child who is learning English can, if exposed, also learn Chinese, French, Russian, Japanese or any other language at the same time and not mix them up! **THIS IS A MONUMENTAL FEAT OF MENTAL GYMNASTICS THAT NO ADULT, NO MATTER HOW SMART, COULD BEGIN TO MATCH.** Little kids do it easily and don't even brag.

P. You are telling me that Erica could learn English, Russian, French all at the same time?

M. You might throw in Chinese too.

P. Are you sure about this?

M. Yes Patty. All little kids are linguistic geniuses.

P. Wouldn't that be a kick! Would you recommend that I arrange for someone to teach Erica a foreign language?

M. I sure do. Why the schools teach foreign languages starting in high school is beyond me. That's a

subject for preschoolers. They'd run circles around high schoolers. I'd start language instruction at 3 or 4.

P. I took French in high school. After two years of pain I learned not much more than how to say adieu and bon jour. Hey, the lady who lives next door is Japanese and her son is about Erica's age.

M. Bingo! That's great. Just get together with her everyday for an hour. You speak only English and she speaks only Japanese to the kids. In six months Erica will speak and understand Japanese.

P. No instruction other than just talking?

M. Nope, that's all you need do. I said 'lil kids are linguistic geniuses. I was not kiddin. Where were we?

P. Ellen's "ungodly". By the way, she called me again today. I had to promise her that I would never talk to you again before she'd let me hang up.

M. *Uh oh....*But you are here...

P. I would sometimes promise her anything, even my left foot, to get her off the phone.

M. Then you believe what I've told you so far?

P. I'm here, aren't I?

M. As for Ellen's "ungodly" comment, in my mind it is ungodly to waste God's most precious gift to mankind -- the gift of intellect. Who does Ellen think gave us our enormous intellectual potential? The Tooth Fairy?

P. LOL!!

M. We squander most of this fabulous gift. I wonder how that makes Him feel? Did you ever think, Patty, of how important intelligence is to homo sapiens?

P. Can't say I have. It's was never one of my top ten interests.

M. Intelligence gives us the keys to the zoo.

P. *I can't wait to hear this.* Please explain that.

M. Just compare our species with the rest of the animal world. We are certainly not the strongest, nor the fastest, and we don't have body armor or stingers. Over all, we're really quite puny. Now consider which animals live in the zoo. There's the big strong elephant, the ferocious lion, the speedy cheetah. Where are the humans?

P. We're the ones who run the zoo.

M. Precisely! And we're the ones who lock up the zoo at night and drive home in our high tech cars. All because of our intellect. That's our edge. So Patty, is intelligence important?

P. Not if you don't mind being locked up in a cage. Hahahaha...

M. Now let's talk about racism. *She'll love this...*

P. Good idea Marsh! I have always wanted to take a course in Bigotry 101!!!!

M. Who do you think are more intelligent, blacks or whites?

P. *The man is serious!!!!* You're serious! <----- doesn't like racist talk. :o( :o( :o(

M. Trust me on this. Who do you think is smarter...blacks or whites? You must have heard that blacks have lower school test scores. Doesn't that mean that whites are smarter?

P. You are not going to draw me into this. :o(

M. C'mon Patty...let's say two babies are born the same day, one African-American and the other White.

Both sets of parents have my book and decide to really go for it and give their kids a tremendous amount of stimulation for five years. At age five, both parents give their kids IQ tests. The White child scores an astounding 210, making him the smartest human being in the galaxy.

P. And the African-American kid?

M. I am very sorry to say that his results weren't so good which undoubtedly proves that Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites. He only scored a minuscule 206!

P. The poor darling is now only the second smartest human in the galaxy. The twerp could lend me 50 points and not miss one of them.

M. Patty, do you now see why the question of which race is smarter is really quite meaningless? Comparing the races is like comparing two men: one with \$9.6 million and the other with \$9.7. Who's richer?

P. They are both extremely wealthy. Is that your point?

M. Yep, sure is. To sum it all up, all kids, no matter what their race, are born with the same enormous intellectual potential. Except for children born with

mental disabilities, all kids can be geniuses, especially by today's dumbed down standards.

P. So who is smarter ...whites or blacks?

M. Compared to their unrealized potentials, both groups are equally dull. Let me tell you about my unofficial and unscientific survey. After I taught Daniel how to read, I began to talk to mothers on phone-in radio talk shows about my adventures as his first teacher. Mothers called frantically seeking advice about reading and phonics. They had kids who couldn't read worth five cents. Many of these mothers also had toddlers so we'd chat for a while about early parental teaching, my favorite subject.

P. What about fathers? Ever talk to 'em?

M. Never. Not once. That's a whole other issue I'd rather not discuss. Let's stick to the outline.

P. <----- piqued interest. Don't let this poor little Irish lass hang. What about Daddys?

M. If we keep changing the subject, we'll both die of old age before we finish this chapter.

P. Marsh, I have my reasons for wanting to discuss Daddys. Indulge me.

M. Okay. Men have this thing about a macho image. They think that a teaching role is for mothers only. No matter how much I tell men that we are great teachers too, they won't listen. They don't think it's their job. :(

P. That's what I thought you'd say. Now tell me about your survey.

M. *She is going to get her hubby, Bill, involved in all this.* :o) Actually, there were two of them, both very informal. The first was a lot of fun. I'd ask mothers, "Do you think your little one is smart?" I must have asked 500 mothers this question. They all gave the same answer.

P. Which was . . . ?

M. Wait. First you must understand that the subject of intelligence is taboo in America. No one wants to talk about it, perhaps because it conjures up images of elitism, racism and so forth. Even the word genius gets bad press. But it's interesting that once mothers were comfortable with me and heard my ideas on the brilliance of little tots and toddlers, they'd let down their guard and tell me, "**MY CHILD IS EXTREMELY SMART!!**" They were so proud that their children were smart and were overjoyed to finally find someone to tell this too.

P. Ellen told me that all the research says that geniuses are an unhappy and screwed up lot. Comment?

M. That's pure balony. Sure, they are some unhappy geniuses, but there are many more unhappy dull and stupid people. On the whole, smarter people lead better and happier lives than those who are not so smart. Let's face it...in this new very high tech world, smarts are in and brawn is out.

P. Do you have any proof of that?

M. Of course not. Do u think I walk around carrying reams of proof?

P. Shouldn't u have proof of what u have been talking about?

M. Patty...as a matter of fact...no. I know that what I am writing is factual and that gives me the right to write it. My book is not going to read like a scholarly text because I am not a scholar. If anyone wants proof, let them read the books I list in Appendix I. My program is for parents, not educators. If parents want very intelligent children, they will do as I say. If they do not, so be it.

Educators like ur sister like to say, “ all the research says” as a tool to sway parents to their position. I once asked a fuzzy head to cite the research for me. He was dumbfounded - apparently because no one ever asked him that before. By his embarrassed stammering, it was obvious that he was blowing gas out of his you know what. There was no such research. He just made it up.

P. LMAO!!!! What was the next survey about?  
*WHEW!*

M. In my conversations with mothers, I ran across some who told me they had preschoolers who were great readers like my son. Some of these women were now grandmothers. I asked them, "How did they do in school?" They always gave me the same answer. It was almost eerie. "Straight A's."

P. I wonder what Ellen would say about that.

M. Ask her.

P. I would if I could stand another three hour diatribe. By the way, you said you were in radio talk shows? You never told me that. Why were u on them?

M. To spread the word about 'lil kidz, phonics, miseducation.

P. Do you think you've succeeded?

M. No where near as much as I've liked to. But the ball game is not yet over. I am reminded of John Paul Jones and Winston Churchill. Jones said, "I've not yet begun to fight" and Churchill said during the darkest days of World War II, "Never give up...Never give up...Never give up." Does that tell u how I feel? This stuff is just too important to let die. No matter the cost, I will continue to preach. Now, how about a story?

P. <----- likes stories. :o)

M. I've got lots of 'em. For a while last year, I put on seminars on early learning at several continuing adult education centers. The director of one of the sites had some interesting things to say when I first proposed this seminar to her. She told me straight out that normally she would not consider sponsoring my seminar (it was called "Telligent Tots,") because I didn't have any credentials in education. Then she said she was going to break the rules because of what happened in her own family. This lady's daughter was one of those very early readers. And, of course, got straight A's in school, and a full scholarship to Harvard . . . and graduated Magna Cum Laude. That's why this lady was a true believer.

P. Could the results be just be coincidental?

M. No way...I asked too many mothers for that.

P. Can u tell me about some of the books I should read?

M. They are in the appendix.

P. I may be a withered old lady before your book is published and I can see the Appendix. Give me some leads now, please.

M. There are two books which will teach you a lot. *Kindergarten Is Too Late* by Masaru Ibuka. This man, who was a co-founder of the Sony Corporation in Japan, has some really far out ideas.

P. Interesting title. What'd he say?

M. Ibuka says that most brain growth is over by the time a child reaches kindergarten. Thus, brain stimulation starting at about five, is too late to make the brain grow significantly. It must be done much earlier, starting the day the child is born, if not sooner.

P. Sooner?

M. Believe it. I hear about couples playing classical music to their unborn children.

P. You're joking.

M. If a child's mind can be stimulated after being born, why not before? Unborn babies can hear.

P. You said these lessons would make me think -- I'm thinking. What about some of Ibuka's other ideas?

M. I don't want to mess up my outline. We'll discuss some of his other ideas later.

P. You may forget and I'm curious NOW.

M. *I'd better deliver...<----- revising outline.* I'll give you one of his choicest opinions. He believes that our educational timetables are upside down. As things stand now, academics are taught starting in first grade. Prior to that time, little kids are given lots of unstructured play. Ibuka's approach is to give kids a lot of academics and brain stimulation from the first year. He thinks that waiting until first grade to teach academics robs our kids of their intellect. I agree.

P. What does he say about first grade and kindergarten?

M. That's the interesting part. These kids would be so capable and intelligent that they would become

independent learners, eliminating the need for formal schooling.

P. Sounds like a Utopian dream that will never happen.

M. Give it about fifty years...it'll happen.

P. <-----Dubious. What's the second book?

M. *How to Multiply Your Baby's Intelligence*, by Glenn Doman. The title says it all. Doman wrote the forward to Ibuka's book and he has some pretty strong ideas too -- every one of which I agree with.

P. Such as?

M. On page 56 he lists his 130 discoveries. Here are a few of them.

- X Every child born has -- at the instant of birth -- a greater potential intelligence than Leonardo Da Vinci ever used.
- X Babies are born believing that learning is a survival skill.
- X All children are linguistic geniuses.
- X Tiny kids have a rage to learn.
- X Schooling starts at six; learning begins at birth.

P. Don't even think about stopping. Interesting.

M. Here are a couple more you'll like.

X Intense curiosity is a characteristic shared by all true scientists -- and by all tiny children.

X Mothers are in danger of having their natural instinct bullied out of them by professionals.

X High intelligence is a product of the environment.

P. I love this guy!!

M. I hope this last point makes you want to read his and Ibuka's books. Here's Doman's most important gem.

***“Almost everything that has been believed previously about intelligence -- its origin, its measurement, its development, its significance, and its outcome -- is either wrong, impractical, or nonsense.”***

P. Ellen would love that one. Haha. It's nice to know you're not the Lone Ranger on this subject.

M. You thought I was the only nut out there? Oops, almost forgot to mention another good book, Joan Beck's *How to Raise a Brighter Child*. Ms. Beck was a syndicated columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*.

P. I've seen her columns. I had no idea that she was into early learning.

M. That's nothing. She was also a great believer in phonics. Incidentally, this whole movement to teach academics to pre-schoolers has been given a neat little name by Doman: THE GENTLE REVOLUTION.

P. That term says a lot.

M. And means a lot too...like the end of all those dreary government statistics on illiteracy and school failure. Plus a lot of dingy educators and psychobabbalists would be out of a job.

P. Explain that, please. *Is he opinionated!*

M. With kids succeeding in school, there won't be so many problems to study and solve. No more idiotic methodologies would be invented by the educators. All the dopeyness would stop.

P. Marsh, you mentioned the word elitism before. Isn't that what you are guilty of? Try and wiggle out of this one.

M. <----- wiggling. :o) If I am guilty, so is the U.S. Army -- the ones who advertise, "Be All You Can Be." In a nutshell, that's what this program is all about, making children all they can be.

P. But then I'd be making my kids superior, elite, to other kids. C'mon.

M. What was your ranking in high school?

P. 5th out of 240. *What's he getting at now?*

M. Not bad, Patty. You were elite . . . better than 235 other students. It's a shame you studied so hard. Wouldn't it have been more egalitarian if you flunked a few exams and ended up 120 out of 240?

P. You're questioning my motive for wanting to do well in school?

M. Well, you're questioning my motives for trying to make kids to be all they can be. Anyway...I've learned that most all parents want their kids to highly intelligent. The trouble is, they won't admit it until they have proof

that their kids are elite compared to others. Then they become proud as peacocks.

P. Marsh...that's a catty thing to say!

M Haven't you seen those bumper stickers that say, "My kid is an honor roll student?" Those parents are reveling in their children's elitism.

P. *I am losing this argument... time to change the subject.* I learned something very important talking to you.

M. *She's trying to change the subject.* What?

P. How much I don't know.

M. That's the best possible beginning. G'night, Patty. Same time tomorrow?

P. Yes, same time. G'night, Marsh.

## CHAPTER 2

### ALL ABOUT PARENTS

In this chapter we are going to talk about parents, as their children's first and best teachers and their responsibilities in the education department.

M. Hiya Patty. How are the kids?

P. Just got 'em to bed...even Bill is snoozin...can I ask you some questions?

M. Fire away.

P. How did you, a CPA of all things, get into all this education stuff? What made you teach your son how to read? How old was he at the time?

M. He hd just had his second birthday when I started the reading lessons. It was a combination of boredom and constantly reading about America's serious illiteracy problem that made me do it. Until the night I made that fateful decision, I read books to him like *Green Eggs and Ham*. After months of reading those books over and over again, I got bored. Worse, I started to dream about green eggs. One night I just couldn't stand reading one more story to Daniel. I distinctly remember him standing

on his bed and watching me throw the book I was holding to the floor. I then yelled out to my wife in the next room, "I am going to teach Daniel how to read to me!" At the time, Daniel was about 2 years old, a little older than Erica. My wife and I could not have known at the time how those few words would so change our lives.

P. How did it change your lives?

M. *She had to ask.* I was once married and I was a practicing CPA....must I continue? :o(((

P. Okayyyyyyyyy...lets change the subject. You said something about illiteracy in America. Please explain.

M. I kept reading about the number of people in America who couldn't read worth five cents -- 27 million, 40 million. While the numbers seemed to vary, the message was abundantly clear. Something was wrong. The schools were laying an enormous egg. I knew that the skill of reading was too crucial for me to just sit back and hope and pray that my son would learn to read. Those odds weren't good enough **FOR MY SON!!**

P. Hey, calm down!

M. This subject makes me crazy. Sorry. There is simply no damn good reason for illiteracy to exist. None, zilch.

P. So you took matters into your own hands?

M. Damn right I did. As a parent, I knew that Daniel's education was ultimately my responsibility, not that of some yet unknown future teachers. That's why I decided to become Daniel's first teacher and teach him to read myself. I wanted to stack the deck in favor of my son.

P. But Marsh, you were an accountant, not a teacher. What gave you the idea you could do it?

M. That thought never entered my head. No one ever told me it was impossible. I suppose that proves that ignorance can really be bliss. Much later I learned that my total ignorance of current educational "wisdom" contributed mightily to my success.

P. I would have thought that one would need some courses in preschool education to teach.

M. That's utter balony.

P. Marsh, is this a home schooling program in disguise?

M. Patty...I am not disguising anything. For the three years until he was five, you could say I home schooled Daniel. After that, I sent him to kindergarten where he learned next to nothing. I am now very sorry I didn't home school him until high school.

P. Why didn't you?

M. Because at the time I didn't know about that possibility or anything about the home schooling movement. Nor did I understand how poor our schools were. Had I known, I never would have sent him to school.

P. Marsh, I am not comfortable with the idea of home schooling. I want you to know that.

M. Patty, I am not writing this book to convince you or anyone else to home school. That's not my mission here. As I see things, it is my job to tell parents about the wonderful world of early academics and what it can do, that's all. What you do after we have our chats, is your business.

P. Is this a reading and math readiness program? I read about them all the time.

M. Hahahahaha. Hardly. My book has nothing whatsoever to do with the “readiness” concept or preparing kids to learn. They are already prepared the day they are born. Instead, I teach parents how to give their little ones the whole enchilada... real academics... real meat, no oatmeal. Readiness is just more educational nonsense.

P. Marsh, let's get something straight from the beginning. I am a mother, not a teacher. I never took one course in education. I have no degrees in it. No training in it. Don't expect too much from me. Okay? *How did I ever get into this?*

M. *She's getting cold feet . . .* If that's true Patty, then tell me who toilet trained your children, taught them how to hold a fork, tie their shoelaces, or behave in public and a million other things.

P. I did, of course. Still do. But that doesn't make me a teacher.

M. It sure does and I bet you are an excellent one at that. Teaching is one of our jobs as parents. These

lessons will simply add reading and math instruction to your already busy curricula. Now let's talk about parents taking on their appointed role as their children's first teachers. Nature seems to play a large role in this department. In essence, we are all preprogrammed to be teachers.

P. Where did you get that idea?

M. From a movie about a mama bear teaching her cubs how to fish in a raging river. Nature programmed that mother bear to be a teacher. All mammals are so programmed, including humans. We just forgot that teaching is one of our jobs because we left it to others. Before the public school system was started in this country who, for the most part, taught our children?

P. Parents, I suppose.

M. Right! Until public education got in the act, parents were the primary teachers. For literally thousands of years we parents were, for the most part, the only teachers.

P. Okay Marsh that makes sense . . . but still, teaching Erica how to read and compute doesn't strike

me as easy or even possible. You know she is only 16 months old!

M. 16 months is a perfect age to start teaching her the alphabet and phonetic sounds.

P. <-----Dubious

M. I think it's time for an attitude change. Like most people, you don't understand the wonderful benefits this teaching adventure will give you. In my entire life I never enjoyed anything nearly as much as I enjoyed the time I spent teaching Daniel real academics. I had so much fun that I eagerly looked forward to our nightly lessons. Being his first teacher was an experience I will always cherish. I don't think he'll forget it either. It pleases me enormously to think that he might have enjoyed it so much that he'll do the same thing for his own kids, my grandchildren.

P. Continue . . . I'm listening. :o)

M. There's also parental pride. Let me tell you a story. I vividly remember this episode. George, one of my tax practice clients, was in my living room and we were talking about his income tax problems. Daniel, who was then about four, burst into the room and jumped

onto my lap. I then did something that should be avoided. I bragged, telling George that Daniel knew how to read. George then said something like, "Yeah . . . yeah . . . yeah." He didn't believe me! I considered George's tepid response an insult and dared him to show Daniel his tax return. He did, and I will never forget what happened next. Daniel started to read it silently and then blurted out, "Dad, what does adjusted gross income mean?" (Don't forget this was a four year old talking!) George then looked at me and whispered in awe, "He can really read!"

P. You must have been really proud.

M. To the max. Next benefit. You will become very close to your children. The bonding factor is greatly enhanced by all that special teaching time you spend with 'em.

P. I think what you're referring to is called quality time.

M. It's the highest quality imaginable. How about a little story?

P. :o)

M.     Soon after I decided to teach Daniel how to read and compute, a teacher told me to stop the lessons as I would cause him unspecified mental damage. I listened to her words of warning, but decided to ignore them because by that time Daniel was already learning the alphabet at lightning speed and we were having a grand ol time together. I couldn't understand how anyone, especially a teacher, could possibly find anything wrong with giving my son lots of quality time. What could be wrong with teaching him how to read?

P.     Then what? *Sounds like Ellen...*

M.     I decided to learn more about what I was doing. What if that teacher was right? I surely didn't want to hurt Daniel in any way. So I went to the library where I found and read *Kindergarten Is Too Late*. That, and two other similar books told me that I was doing exactly the right thing.

P.     Marsh, Ellen called me again. When I told her I am still talking to you about teaching Erica academics, she had a royal fit and started bouncing off the walls. I never saw her so upset before. She takes serious exception to your ideas.

M. *Damnit, her sister had to be a fuzzy headed professor.* Considering her position, I would have expected little else. My ideas make a mockery of most everything she knows about early education.

P. Go on . . .

M. Educators like to think that reading instruction is their sole domain and that parents don't know a thing about it. They say... "leave the teaching to us...we are the experts....we'll do the job." As I see things, parents are in charge of the educational roost and have the final say so about the education of their children. As for them being "experts", their record speaks loud and clear for itself.

P. Now you seem to be bouncing off the wall. What gives between you and the educators?

M. Lets just say that I know about all the millions of lives that have been ruined by miseducation. Okay?

P. Marsh, are you really sure I can teach reading and math? I know I have asked u this b4.

M. Honest Patty, compared to keeping his room clean and neat, teaching reading and math was duck

soup. I will teach you everything you need to know. That's a promise. And, by the way, as a parent, you have some advantages that make your success highly probable.

P. I do? :o) What are they?

M. Does anyone love your children as much as you do? Does anyone care as much about their future? Would anyone else sacrifice as much for them as you and Bill?

P. Those are MY kids you're talking about! The answer is NO to all of those questions.

M. I was hoping you'd feel that way. Secondly, you will be teaching on a one-on-one basis. You will be giving one child your undivided attention. Teachers, in contrast, teach twenty or more kids in a class. That gives you a tremendous advantage. That's why home schooled kids often do so well.

P. What else? So far, this sounds pretty good. :o)

M. As I said before, ignorance is an advantage. My travels in the murky world of American education have taught me that much of what the educators (the college

professors who teach the teachers) know is totally wrong. As a parent who has never taken a course in their failure ridden methodologies, you are ahead. What you don't know can't hurt you or your kids. In a few months, you'll know far more about teaching preschoolers than all the pros put together. Why do you think I was so successful? Like you, I never took a course in education. That was my biggest edge.

P Marsh, what's wrong with our educational system that creates all those dropouts and illiterates? Lack of phonics instruction?

M. *I could write a book on that, all by itself.* Patty, it's that and much more. All that will come toward the end of the book. Let's talk now about inspiring kids and setting a good example. As a parent, you have much more influence on Erica's life than you might think. You can not only affect her ultimate intelligence, but her life skills, her attitudes, and even her personality. What I am saying here is that parents are extremely crucial when it comes to their children's development, much more so than teachers.

P. Go on, this is interesting. Tell me more about the personality part. :o)

M. Like everything else, a person's personality is partly inherited and partly influenced by the environment. Kids mimic and imitate their parents. Whatever we do, they want to do. Keeping in mind that I wanted Daniel to practice reading, I would often say to him, "GOSH...DO I LOVE TO READ!". As often as possible, I would read in front of him to set an example. I spared no effort to show my enthusiasm and love of reading or whatever else I wanted him to do. In the personality department, I kept an upbeat positive attitude which he mimicked and learned. Everything we do as parents has an affect on them, particularly during the first three years. Parents should never fight or argue in front of their younguns. And, it is always good for parents to show affection to each other. Let's talk about what Harry Truman said.

P. Huh?????

M. You'll see. Have some patience. First I need an answer to a question. If a child is mistaught in school and, as a consequence, that child ends up in a minimum wage job, who's to blame? Who's responsible?

P. I'm not sure. What do you mean?

M. Are the educators who mistaught the child around to claim credit? Would they visit the hamburger joint and apologize to the victim for locking him into a minimum wage job for the rest of his life?

P. Of course not. *What's he getting at? Harry Truman?*

M. But, the parents are still around, right? How do you think they feel watching their children working in dead end minimum wage jobs? Wouldn't they wonder what happened? Who was responsible for this sad end result?

P. <----- getting fired up! So what about Harry Truman?

M. He kept a plaque on his desk in the Oval Office that read, "THE BUCK STOPS HERE." As much as that may apply to the Presidency, it applies even more so in our role as parents. We must get involved and fulfill our responsibilities in the educational arena. If we do not...you know where the buck stops.

P. Good 'ol give 'em hell Harry!! But Marsh, be fair. You can't always blame the parents. It can't always be their fault when kids fail in school.

M. I never said it was all their fault...but it is their responsibility. If kids fail because they weren't properly taught the basic core subjects such as reading and math, you know who's to blame - the fuzzy heads.

P. Fuzzy heads...you keep using that term...please explain.

M. That's my term for the psychologists, PhDs and EdDs in education...the culprits who have ruined our educational system. Let's not discuss them now. Plenty of time later for that.

P. Great. When do the reading lessons start. Tomorrow?

M. Not so fast Patty. There are a lot of things to tell you before that starts. Are you in a hurry?

P. Yes...I am in a hurry. I am now anxious to teach Erica how to read.

M. Before we end this lesson, I should tell you about some logistics. When and where to teach and how long...that kind of stuff.

P. Okay. Who does the teaching, Bill or me?

M. Ask yourself who has the better teaching attitude, who really wants to do it? Then answer your own question.

P. How about if Bill and I share the job?

M. That would sure bring new meaning to family togetherness. Why not, as long as there's no disagreement between you two about who does what.

P. Now let's do the how long part.

M. It depends.

P. Why didn't you just say half an hour and go on? The word "depends" makes me think you are about to go into a long diatribe. So -- how long?

M. Think of a bucket with a hole in the bottom. How long do you imagine it would take to fill it with water?

P. *His parables kill Me.* That's your answer? How about a simple, straight reply?

M. I am trying to make the point that you will never fill up the bucket, no matter how hard you try or how long you spend trying to do it. Think of Erica's brain and

compare it to the bucket. There is no possibility you can fill it to the top with facts or knowledge -- it's like a bottomless pit. Erica's brain can store more knowledge than a mainframe computer.

P. Her brain is that powerful?

M. It sure is. What I am getting at -- and this is important -- is that no one knows how much knowledge the human brain can absorb. It boils down to this: the more you put in, the more you get out. The human brain is a bottomless pit.

P. How much time did you spend doing this with Daniel?

M. It varied. On average, I'd say about forty minutes a day.

P. Erica is screaming bloody murder about something. Be right back. Don't leave.

**LATER**

P. Backkkkkkkkk.

M. Is Erica okay?

P. She was upset because she couldn't figure out the square root of three. Hahaha.

M. LOL! Let's talk about the time of day for lessons. I did it right before Daniel's bedtime. For me, this was a good time as I didn't have any business distractions in the evening. Some kids might be too tired by then. Daniel wasn't.

P. How about first thing in the morning?

M. Sure, that's fine too. Just be sure that whenever you give the lessons there are no distractions like a blaring TV or ringing telephones. You must give your child your undivided attention.

P. Where's the best place to teach?

M. Any room free of distractions. I taught Daniel in his bedroom. Take your pick.

P. You sure are reasonable today. Now, for how many endless years do I continue these lessons?

M. A parent's teaching job is never over, you must know that. But to get more specific, you can stop the formal lessons when Erica is a great reader.

P. How can I tell when that happens?

M. One day, and it will happen, something will occur to let you know that you succeeded beyond your wildest dreams. You'll find it very exciting and satisfying.

P. I assume that a certain something happened with Daniel.

M. Yes, and it was unforgettable. After a year and a half worth of lessons, I knew that Daniel could read but the restaurant episode really brought that fact home. One day I took Daniel out for Chinese food. The waitress gave me a menu, but she skipped Daniel. "Where's mine?" he asked indignantly. She gave him one and he proceeded to read it out loud. The waitress and I watched in awe as Daniel old read the menu and nonchalantly said, "I'd like moo shu pork and an egg roll, please." That's the kind of thing that will tell you that the formal reading lessons need not be continued.

P. It's amazing he could read moo shu.

M. WHEN ONE KNOWS PHONICS, ONE CAN  
READ ALMOST ANYTHING

P. What do I do if Erica is sick or just too tired for a lesson?

M. In that case, skip them. That will happen. Do the same if you are very tired or in a foul mood. In no way should these lessons be associated with pain or unpleasantness by either parent or child.

P. That makes good sense. Uh oh, I hear Erica again.

M. 1.7320508.

P. Huh?

M. Erica may want to know the square root of three.  
:o)

### **A BIT LATER**

P. You said you taught Daniel right before bedtime. Wasn't he tired then?

M. In the 16 months that the formal lessons lasted, Daniel was maybe too tired twice. Remember that he considered these lesson to be great fun.

P. Marsh, Ellen called again this morning and insisted that teaching Erica how to read at her age will rob her of her childhood. Says she is coming over in the morning to set me straight on a few things.

M. Robbery? I would call it liberation. May I get on my soapbox?

P. *Why didn't I call it quits earlier?* I sense that you are already standing on it.

M. Okay. Ellen says that learning how to read robs kids of their childhood. But ask yourself Patty, robs them of what? Of ignorance? The world is a very fascinating place...what can be wrong with sharing this with our children, no matter what their age? I also find it interesting that people who decry teaching reading to toddlers say nothing about the disgusting shows kids are allowed to watch on television. Did Ellen ever call you and threaten to bomb your TV?

P. No, she never did.

M. Then, by implication, it is fine with her if you share murder and mayhem in the world with Erica but not okay to teach her reading so that they can learn all

about the finer things in our world. That's what reading can give her. Do you see my point?

P. Yes guru...can we end this chapter already?

M. Yes madame.

P. What's next on the agenda?

M. Just some stuff about kids, and a few other things.

P. Complicated stuff?

M. I told you that this is really simple. Really. Most of it is just plain old common sense.

P. Okay Marsh, see ya tomorrow nite.

M. Nite Patty.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **ALL ABOUT 'LIL KIDS**

Little kids are much more special than we think. Read on and learn why.

M. Hiya Patty...want to get started?

P. Sure. Can I start?

M. You have the floor.

P. Isn't it amazing how very curious infants and toddlers are? They seem to want to explore everything. It's as if they are driven to learn about all they see, hear, and touch. Where do you think they get that from?

M. Their curiosity is a survival instinct that they are born with. It must be as instinctive as blinking their eyes. I once saw an antelope being born on TV. Within minutes of birth, the baby tried desperately to stand on its four wobbly legs and walk. It was surrounded by adult antelopes, protecting it against predators. Instinctively, that baby antelope knew it must learn to walk within twenty minutes or the adults would abandon it to face certain death by the lions.

P. Compared to that, we humans are born totally helpless. It takes us longer than a year to learn how to walk and talk.

M. So, obviously our species is different from all the others on earth. We don't rely on brawn for survival. Instead, we have our intellect. It's our brain power that separates us from all other animals. Our instinctual drive to learn is strongest when we are young, from birth to about age five. That's also when the human brain is doing most of its growing. At age five, the brain is about 80% fully developed. That's why Ibuka entitled his book, *Kindergarten Is Too Late*.

P. I assume your Wonderkidz program is based on feeding that instinctive rage to learn.

M. Exactly. You are here to learn how to gas up these little learning machines with high octane fuel. We don't even begin to understand their fabulous capabilities. For my money, 'lil kidz are America's biggest wasted resources so let's gas em up and watch them zoooooooooom.

P. Marsh, did you ever notice how open minded little kids are?

M. How could I not notice? The fact is, they have not yet developed any opinions, preconceived notions or prejudices. Another thing...they do not know the meaning of the word impossible. They will try anything...utterly fearless. I've been thinking about what we were just talking about...about their open minds. Their minds must be like a blank piece of paper, ready and waiting for someone to write on it. Do you remember a song from "South Pacific" that says, "You've got to be taught to hate and fear . . . it's got to be drummed in your dear little ear . . . you've got to be taught to be afraid of people whose eyes are oddly made?" Great lyrics. That's what we're talking about and it applies just as much to attitudes as it does to learning the alphabet and the multiplication tables. To a large extent, parents control what is written on the empty blackboards of their children's minds.

P. Have you also noticed how competitive little kids are?

M. Competitive? Patty, their desire to win would intimidate most professional athletes. They're absolutely relentless in their pursuit of victory. I used that to great advantage in the lessons, particularly with math. You'll see when we get to that section.

P. Any more thoughts about the urchins?

M. Well...little kids are born with no end of self-confidence. They think the world revolves around them. In a few years reality sets in and they begin to learn otherwise. Our job is to not let too much of that self confidence disappear.

P. Here's another question: Can we even teach babies, kids who are under a year old?

M. The rule is...the younger they are, the better. Uh oh...heartburn...

P. Huh?

M. I had two Chicago hot dogs for dinner with the works. My gut is on fire.

P. Works?

M. Yeah...means everything is put on em: mustard, pickles, peppers, relish, kraut, celery seed, tomatoes, onions, and radioactive uranium.

P. No mayo?

M. Yikes! In Chicago putting mayo on a hot dog is a worse sin than being an honest politician. You can get shot for putting mayo on a hotdog.

P. You're so silly!!! :o)

M. It's part of my charm. You can ask my wife, Julie, about that.

P. You never mentioned that you were married.

M. We're not...at least not legally. We cohabit the same living quarters. But I love her and consider her my wife.

P. How long have you lived together?

M. Just 8 years.

P. After all that time you should marry her.

M. And ruin a perfectly good love affair? No way.

P. What does she think of all this education stuff?

M. When we first met, she thought I was a bit loony. If you didn't notice, I am rather passionate and opinionated about this subject.

P. I didn't notice. LOL! Now what does she think about all this?

M. She's sitting right here. Let her tell you.

J. Hi, Patty. . . Julie here.

P. Hey Julie...would you tell me what you think about this?

J. When Marsh and I met, I told him I was interested in learning and sharing something new and interesting with someone -- something like tennis or canoeing or chess. I never expected anything resembling Wonderkidz or all the other nutty things he's involved with. For more than eight years this stuff has been blowing my mind.

P. Don't ya think he's a bit eccentric?

J. He's wildly eccentric! But I wish I would have known what he knows thirty years ago. Would have saved me no end of trouble with the schools -- supposedly good schools, I might add.

P. What was the problem?

J. The schools taught just one of my three children how to read well. The other two were mistaught, miseducated, labeled dyslectic, sent to remedial classes.....yadda yadda yadda. Every week or so I flew to meetings with teachers and counselors, all of which amounted to nothing. It was a nightmare, Patty. Don't let it happen to you or your kids.

P. That bad, eh?

J. Worse than you can imagine. Now I'm angry, even though it's too late for anger to do any good for my kids. Because of what I've learned from our eccentric hot dog eating friend, I now know that everything I went through could have been prevented. How do you think that makes me feel? Damn! Here's Marsh.

M. Now you know know why Julie is helping me write the book.

P. <----- gettin drift. Continue the lesson!

M. Haven't you noticed how little kids ignore their toys after a minute or two? Most toys are hopelessly boring. Little kids want to play with their parents, their

biggest and best toy. No toy on earth can possibly interest a child as much as a parent can.

P. I don't think of myself as a toy.

M. You are your children's best toy. Count on it. The computer is another toy that is worthy of their intellect. We'll discuss computers later.

P. Everything juicy is later with Marsh. How much later? I'm real curious about this.

M. A few weeks. Please don't ask me to talk computers now. You know I have this meticulous outline Julie is making me follow.

P. I thought CPAs were supposed to be organized and meticulous.

M. Most are, but not me. LOL. I used to spend hours looking for misplaced papers. It's one reason why I quit the business. Where were we?

P. I thought you retired from accounting.

M. Please Patty, I am not that old! I just quit out of disgust.

P. Are you happier now that you're out of accounting?

M. Much happier and much poorer.

P. Well, you could always go back to it if you are starving. Couldn't you?

M. Who's starving? Anyway, I'd rather croak than go back to that miserable life. From January 1 to April 15, the tax season, I did not have a life. Money is not that important.

P. I gather you had a mid life crisis.

M. *She has no idea how much of a crisis it really was.* You could say that. It's what happens when one chooses the wrong business or profession. I won't make that mistake again. Let's call it a night...ok?

P. G'night Marsh. See you tomorrow.

.

#### **NEXT EVENING**

P. Hiya Marsh. What's on the agenda today?

M. Television

P. Somehow I would have thought you'd be against TV.

M. I sure am. But programs and teaching videos like Sesame Street will teach Erica many things, including good English enunciation. For older children like Mickey, television teaches violent behavior. Try Saturday morning cartoons.

P. Did u let Daniel watch TV?

M. Big mistake. I should have thrown the damn thing out.

P. But that would have deprived you and your wife.

M. It would have deprived us of no end of drivel. Patty, trust me. There is a life without television...a very good one. For all of the last 8 years, maybe I have watched 12 hours of the tube and that was mostly the Olympics.

P. Then how do u spend ur evenings?

M. Julie and I talk...play lots of Scrabble, write, garden, walk, visit friends, play bridge, go to the library. Patty... I kick myself when I think of all the years I sat in front of the box as a spectator.

P. As opposed to what?

M. Let me quote something one of my on-line cronies just sent me. "There are two kinds of people..."dem who are goin somewhere and dem who are going nowhere." Chronic TV couch potatoes are among those going nowhere. They waste their lives...their vast human potential.

P. Marsh, that's insulting to those of us who do watch TV. Who are u to decide how I should spend my time? *He sounds like a preacher.*

M. Sorry...please don't get annoyed. I meant no insult.

P. That's ok. What's on for tomorrow?

M. Turning you into a better teacher than u already are.

P. Good night Marsh.

M. Nite Patty.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE MAKING OF A GREAT TEACHER

This chapter will teach you how to be a better teacher than you already are.

P. Hi Marsh...I'm ready.

M. Hiya Toots...welcome again. Patty, you said that Erica won't sit still. I had the same problem. After I began to teach Daniel the alphabet, I soon realized that something was wrong because he wouldn't pay attention to me for more than five minutes. Then I tried something different. I decided to get into his world instead of trying to make him get into my starchy adult world. To do that I began to sometimes act silly, irreverent, whatever it took to keep his attention. I also smiled and laughed a lot. In substance, I often became a kid... not always, but often enough.

P. That did the trick?

M. You bet. Interestingly enough, I began to really enjoy being in his world. Because of my hum-drum life in accounting, this nightly escape into Daniel's world was fun.

P. Sounds like you were putting on a nightly performance.

M. Yes, I suppose so. Little kids love to be entertained, especially by their parents. Give them that and they'll do almost anything you want. Surely you've heard people say that little kids have very short attention spans. That's a lot of baloney. Whoever came up with that notion knows very little about kids. If you approach them correctly, their attention span mushrooms.

P. What is their attention span? Ten minutes? Half an hour?

M. I never did discover the limits of Daniel's attention span because no matter how long our lessons were, he never got bored. After I learned the secret, I always had his full attention. Two hours at times.

P. What if I can't do that? What if I bore Erica to distraction?

M. We all have a little kid hidden deep inside us who is dying to come out and play.

P. You mean your so called inner child?

M. That's the latest term for it, yes. Just let go and let your little girl go out and play. It's easy -- you'll see. Next, let me say a few words about enthusiasm. You must convey this spirit to your children. If they see that you are bored or unenthusiastic about the lessons, they will lose interest. Kids are very intuitive. If Erica sees that you like doing something like listening to music and are enthusiastic, they will like it too. Did you know that Democritus, the ancient Greek, made a life's study of enthusiasm?

P. Can't say I did. When do we get to the reading lessons?

M. You sure are impatient.

P. Patience is not one of my strong points. What's next?

M. Let me check the outline...praise is the next topic.

P. I already know how to praise my kids. *I don't need him to tell me how to praise my children!*

M. I know that. But I just want to teach you some additional pointers. Remember, I said that I wanted to

make you a better teacher than you already are. During the lessons I used words like good, great, gosh, okay, that's wonderful, terrific, or any number of other complimentary phrases. If Daniel did something especially impressive, I'd raise his right arm. He loved that, but there was one thing he liked even more. That was a CELEBRATION. I remember when he first put a puzzle of the United States together. I was thrilled by his accomplishment. Because of my response, he made it his business to learn how to do other puzzles. It amazed me what Daniel would do to elicit more such celebrations.

P. What kind of celebration?

M. We celebrated his triumphs by doing "Ring Around The Rosie." He squealed with joy when I fell down with him.

P. I can see what you mean about getting into their world. How often did you do this?

M. This is one of those areas where you must use your parental judgment. Too little celebration is not good, too much is redundant. Here's a warning... be careful not to give your Erica things instead of verbal praise. That means no candy, toys, or promises to let

them watch television. She must feel that learning and knowledge is a reward unto itself. Besides, because she will be so often correct, you'd quickly run out of things to give her, but you'll never run out of verbal praise.

P. So far, you're making sense. Go on.

M. Just thought of something else important. I saw a public service announcement made by the Mormons that I'll never forget. It showed a little kid proudly showing his father his report card with "As" on it. Instead of showing enthusiasm for his son's report card, the father asked his son if he cleaned up his room yet.

P. What a downer! He might have waited to ask about his son's room until later.

M. I still remember that kid's face when his father rained on his parade. Let's change the subject. One of the hallmarks of a great teacher is patience. Some people get very discouraged when they start teaching because they want to see instant dramatic results. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. Erica's progress will appear at times to be slow and you must be prepared for that. Even when she begins to recognize words and starts to read, you will hardly notice it. I suspect that if you could peer into her brain, however,

you'd see a lot of feverish activity and brain growth going on. Moving on...let's talk about perseverance. Once you get started teaching, there will be a temptation to quit. You must not because so much is at stake. The rest of Erica's life will be greatly affected by what you do now.

P. Marsh, I understand the importance of these lessons, but aren't over dramatizing it a bit?

M. Not at all. These lessons will do two things for Erica. For one, eliminate the possibility of academic failure and more importantly, vastly increase her IQ. Very smart people work in better and higher paying jobs, and are generally a happier lot. On the other hand, life is a constant struggle for the dull among us.

P. I am not sure how to respond to what u just said.

M. Patty, our Constitution has some nice flowery language about us being equal, but the fact is, we are not all equal. I know that sounds elitist and snobbish, but it's the truth.

P. Do you think many parents will persevere?

M. I have presented this in seminars about twelve times over the years. I'd say that maybe 5% of the parents did much with what I taught them. The rest succumbed to laziness and apathy. Sure, they left the lecture all fired up....but their interest eventually waned. Sigh.

P. I gather that upsets you.

M. You're right, it sure does. Many of those who never started or gave up will be the same ones who will complain bitterly when their kids are labeled as learning disabled or get poor grades. That won't be a problem if you give this program about six weeks. After that, Erica won't let you give up, and you won't want to because you'll both be having a blast. Too many people expect dramatic, immediate results and give up too soon. There are lots of excuses for throwing in the towel.

P. If I heeded my sister's words, I'd give up now. She thinks I'm going to mercilessly pressure Erica to learn, and blames you.

M. Who else? Then let's talk about pressure. I confess that there is a lot of pressure involved in these lessons.

P. Oh?

M. Yes, lots of pressure. More than you could imagine. *I am going to get her...Haha*

P. You should have told me this before. I won't pressure Erica!

M. When did I say anything about **you** pressuring Erica?

P. <-----utterly confused.

M. The educators use the pressure ploy very effectively to scare parents away from early academics and parental instruction. It's their favorite weapon. Let's take a ten minute break. I need a snack. I have a story to tell you when we come back.

P. What's it about? *I love his crazy stories...*

M. The TV show I was on.

P. See you in ten minutes. *He was on TV?*

**LATER**

P. Hi, Marsh. I'm ready for the story.

M. Okay...one day I got a call from a television producer who had heard about Daniel's exploits in early academia. He thought it would be a great topic for his afternoon show. I was flattered so I agreed to be his guest. Well, everything started out fine. I told my story to the audience which seemed receptive. But I soon figured out that the show's host salted the audience with educators and child psychologists who lost no time in attacking me and everything I'd done.

P. Boooooooooooooo hisssssssssssssss!

M. You might guess that I was somewhat less than pleased by this turn of events. I didn't enjoy hearing fuzzy head after fuzzy head insinuate that I did something harmful to my son . . . that I was mercilessly pressuring him to learn. You can't imagine the baloney I had to listen to until I decided to strike back. I waited to pick the right target. He was a particularly weasily looking fuzzy head, a professor of child psychology at a local university. I asked him if he had ever taught his kids how to read and compute as I had done. He admitted he had not. "If you had, Professor," I said in the most mocking voice I could muster, "you would know that parents aren't the culprits -- it's the kids who do all

the pressuring. You might consider going back to school for some remedial study before you maliciously attack teaching parents again!"

P. HURRAY! <----- jumping up and down with glee.

M. The parents in the audience applauded too. :o)  
It's really true, if you make learning lots of fun and a great joy, Erica will pressure you for more lessons...more games...more learning. What could be better than that?

P. A world without lawyers and politicians. Hahaha. Anything else happen?

M. What occurred the day after amazed me. Calls started coming in early in the morning from concerned parents who wanted to learn more about my teaching techniques. During the ensuing few weeks, I got about 300 such calls and my mail box was overloaded with hundreds of letters from more parents. Apparently I had hit an exposed nerve.

One such call I will never forget was from a grandmother who told me that her two sons were not allowed to enter the local university because they **COULD NOT READ!** She said that both her sons got

Bs and Cs in school so she thought everything was okay. "No one told me my boys couldn't read." I was aghast. I had read accounts about how some schools just passed kids through the system without regard for what they really learned. This was the first time I was hearing about it directly from someone who had experienced it. She asked me for some of my written materials so she could do the same with her grandchildren. Then she, **"I was flim-flammed once by those bastards...but I won't let them do it to me again. Black Americans must fight back for their kids!"**

P. How could a school do something like that? :o(

M. Being on that TV show started me on the road to being a virulent education critic. Shortly thereafter I went on many radio talk shows with my story. One hostess called me the "underground educator," a term that I was billed under for years. Moving right along. Do you like to brag?

P. No, bragging is not one of my 487 faults. What are you getting at?

M. 487?

P. It used to be less, until Bill taught me a few dozen of his own after we got married. :o)

M. LOL! What I am going to tell you now won't make you a better teacher, but it will make your life more pleasant. No matter how successful you are at teaching your kids, do not brag about Erica's accomplishments or tell anyone u are teaching her. No one wants to hear about how smart Erica is. That includes all your non-teaching friends, your sister, your other relatives, and the corner butcher. No one will ever forgive your success. Trust me on this one. People are funny about the whole subject of intelligence and early parental instruction. Some people, particularly other parents, will not cheer for you because you are upsetting the apple cart. Almost everyone you know expects that your children will grow up just like theirs. They are comfortable with that thought. But if you change the rules of the game and make Erica much smarter than their kids, you'll find them unforgiving.

P. Can I discuss it with other parents who are also doing it?

M. Yes. Other like minded parents are an exception to the no-talk rule. Next comes consistency. That means that it's not good to skip lessons. Little kids are

creatures of habit and habits are best formed by constant repetition, without interruption. Avoid giving two lessons and then skipping two. Especially in the first three months. Try to give Erica a lesson every night, without fail.

P. Doesn't take a genius to digest that one. What did you do when Daniel made a mistake?

M. I had a royal fit and put a very big frown on my face. Sometimes I even screamed in anger and frustration.

P. No you didn't! That would have ruined everything. You're kidding me, right?

M. Of course I am. When the lessons first started, I remember thinking about this mistake business. I didn't want Daniel's mistakes to destroy his ego, so I invented the mistake game. It worked so well I should patent it and box it for sale.

P. I notice that you don't hesitate to give yourself a little praise.

M. I sure don't. I'm very proud of what I did and how I did it. As adults, we spend much time thinking about

our failures and mistakes. If we finally do something worthwhile, why not praise ourselves?

P. You have a point. Now tell me about the mistake game.

M. I began by asking Daniel, "Want to play the mistake game?" Since this game was his favorite, he always said yes. Then, I'd point to a letter or a number and ask him its name. He'd look at an "F" and reply "T". "Daniel, you blew it. That's not a T. It's an F. You made a mistake." Then it became his turn to catch me making a mistake. He'd point to a letter and I'd intentionally make a mistake. Then he'd squeal, "Daddy! You blew it! You made a mistake!!" The mistake game taught him that making a mistake was acceptable. He assumed that if Daddy could err then it must be okay if he did too. As a result of this game, he never took it as an insult if I asked him to try again.

P. I like it. :o)

M. Now here's a warning that you'd better heed. Don't ever let Erica know how important these lessons are to you. Kids are instinctive blackmailers! To combat this, I always said to Daniel, "If you misbehave, no lessons tonight!" I went out of my way to give him the

impression that the lessons were important to him, not to me. This also meant that I never nagged him to learn or practice. I adopted an "I don't care" attitude which resulted in the fact that I never had to plead with him to learn.

P. Any more hints?

M. Yes, delete the words dumb and stupid from your vocabulary or any other negative words. Never -- never -- use 'em in ur home or elsewhere.

P. But sometimes they do act dumb and stupid.

M. That's true. But children don't need to know those words exist -- certainly not in relation to them. Your job is to build self-esteem, not tear it down by saying something like, "that's a dumb thing to say." Instead, I'd often say to Daniel, "Gosh, are you smart!" I even called him erudite, sagacious, and numerous other things denoting capability and brilliance -- never dumb-dumb!

I also have some other ideas about self-esteem, the latest catch phrase of the child psychologists. No parent should underestimate the importance of self-esteem. About 1000 years ago, when I was a kid, a lack

of self-esteem was called an inferiority complex. Today it's the same thing with a different label.

Kids who have high self esteem are much more likely to succeed in school and in life than those who do not. Parents alone cannot give their kids self-esteem. Kids have to earn it for themselves, by themselves. They get it through feelings of accomplishment and self-satisfaction over having done something well. We can only give them the encouragement that will enable them to experience those feelings.

In a nutshell, SUCCESS BREEDS SUCCESS. If children succeed at something special, that success is not lost on them. Here's an example. Daniel entered kindergarten reading at the 4th or 5th grade reading level. Because the other kids his age still couldn't read, he knew he was special.

P. Continue...

M. I'd like to talk a bit about expectations -- high and low. It fits in with our chat on self-esteem. Here's a story about this. When my daughter turned 11, I gave her \$500 for her birthday, with no strings attached. I let her deposit the check in a savings account in her name alone. I told her that I trusted her not to waste it, and to

save it for when she really needed it. She left it untouched for four years and then gradually started to use it to buy clothes when she discovered the opposite sex.

P. Did she ask permission to spend the money?

M. No. I made it very clear that she was the boss of the money, no strings. I think my expectation that she wouldn't squander the money translated into her acting responsibly.

P. Nice story. <-- clapping. *I've got to remember this.*

M. The point is...kids will rise to the level of parental expectations. The more parents expect, the more their kids will deliver. The reverse is also true. Low expectations will breed low performance.

P. What about a teacher's expectations and attitudes towards our children? We can't control how they feel about our kids -- we can't control their attitude.

M. Not true. Parents can easily influence a teacher's attitude. Just make Erica super smart and teach her respect for adults and proper behavior. That'll do the trick. Her teachers will love her.

P. Marsh, I had a thought last night. Got time for it now?

M. Sure Patty, fire away.

P. That story about the grandmother who learned that her own boys could not read...well, she used the big B word. Are you going to use it? Some parents might be offended.

M. You are right, some parents do not like cuss words. But all I am doing is quoting word for word what the lady said. It stays in. Let's call it a nite. Okay?

P. Yes. And by the way, so far this is very interesting. See you tomorrow. G'nite Marsh.

### **NEXT NIGHT**

M. Hi Patty. How's Erica's brain doing? :o)

P. She learned Chinese last night. Tonight Japanese is on the menu. By the way, those articles you snail mailed me arrived today. I'm impressed. The author is backing up everything you've been talking about. I gave them to Ellen.

M. What did she think of them? *As if I don't already know.*

P. She flipped out again.. She says it makes no difference what the pointy headed scientists say, preschool kids should not be taught to read. Also, she despises you and everything you stand for and thinks your advice stinks. Then she called you a sociopath, a charlatan, a Republican and anything else awful that she could think of.

M. She forgot communist. LMAO!

P. LMAO!

M. Really Patty, what's with your sister? Is she always so venomous?

P. Not always. But about you and our nightly lessons, she's an absolute lunatic. Totally irrational. I think she believes that you are belittling everything she learned about education. It's doubly bad because you are not degreed in education.

M. Sigh

P. Is that all you can say?

M. What do you want me to say? Patty, I am not here to defend myself. I've done battle with her type many times and I've learned not to argue with them. It's a waste of time. ...let's change the subject.

P. Okay. Okay. That article you sent me about the brain...there was one thing that amused me. One of the researchers said, in reference to foreign language instruction, "Who is the idiot who decided that youngsters should learn foreign languages in high school?"

M. Please, I don't want to talk about the educators and their ridiculous timetables now. That comes later. Let's talk about the Socratic method of instruction.

P. I have been waiting my whole life to talk about this. I even dream about Socrates at night.

M. Patty! It is with this method that I taught Daniel almost everything he learned. Basically, the Socratic method involves question and answer conversations. It was a very effective and interesting way to conduct a lesson. Daniel and I had the same kind of back and forth banter that you and I are engaged in right now. I was careful though. I made sure I didn't talk down to him. I

encouraged him to speak his piece and voice his opinions, and I listened to what he had to say. *I really listened*

P. *Uh oh, do I always listen to my kids talk?* Did you always listen to Daniel?

M. No, I don't really think so. But after the lessons started, I sure did.

P. Why didn't you listen?

M. Well, there is a difference between hearing and really listening. The latter only started after I began to witness Daniel's amazing learning abilities. That's when I started to respect him. Prior to that, I guess I was stuck in the all too typical "me adult, you kid" role. All of a sudden I began to look upon Daniel as more of an equal human being, not just a kid. It was an intellectual revolution that changed the way I thought about him.

P. Interesting...continue.

M. The next thing to learn concerns something I call "automaticity." It means that Erica must be given certain basic knowledge so often that she learns it as well as she knows her own name. Instant recognition is the goal

here. The alphabet is one prime example and the math tables are another. Such basic information can only be learned to automaticity through constant repetition and long term practice. Patty, this is vital...I can't stress its importance enough.

P. Repetition sounds boring.

M. That's what the educators think too, so they avoid it. The trouble is, little kids ADORE repetition! You can read them the same story over and over again a thousand times and they will never tire of it.

P. Okay...next topic?

M. <-----not done with repetition.

P. I was afraid of that...:(

M. Hey Patty....this is important stuff that you must know.

**YOUR CHILD MUST KNOW THE ALPHABET SO THOROUGHLY THAT SHE CAN INSTANTLY AND WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST HESITATION RECOGNIZE EVERY LETTER AND SOUND.** It's like a typist knowing exactly where all the keys are without thinking about it. There is only one way to get that

information into automaticity and that's through extensive, repetitive practice.

P. You are repeating yourself.

M. I did it on purpose. How do spell your name?

P. Marsh!

M. Please answer the question.

P. Okay...P-A-T-T-Y. Happy?

M. Did you have to think before you knew the answer?

P. About a billionth of a second. Is that too long? What's the point?

M. It was an example of automaticity. You automatically knew the answer. In practical terms, if you must think about how to read while reading, you are not reading well.

P. So if I point to "F" and Erica must think about what it is, that's not good enough, right?

M. Two billionths of a second is too long. The concept of automaticity may not sound all that important, but it is vital. That's why I'm harping on it.

P. Sounds like rote learning to me.

M. Yes! And nothing else works any where near as well. Only with repetitive long term practice (rote learning) will get such knowledge into a Erica's LTUM.

P. LTUM?

M. Yep. Long Term Unforgettable Memory.

P. Okay, I got it! You point is forever branded into my LTUM Forever! Sheesh!!

M. I wouldn't force it down your throat unless it was crucial. And don't be such a grouch. Rote learning simply means repeating something so often that Erica's brain memorizes and cannot forget it.

P. I gather it's the same with math.

M. You bet it is. If you ask someone what  $8 \times 7$  is and they have to think a bit before saying 56, they don't know it well enough to master math. What I am leading

up to is that the basic knowledge in any subject must be practiced and learned to automaticity. Once the basics are learned, then one must practice, practice, and practice some more to master the skill. This is true for reading, piano playing, typing, dancing, basketball, gymnastics, ice skating, public speaking or any other skill.

P. Practice makes perfect, eh?

M. Next....I once told you that boredom is the kiss of death in learning. Well, one of the best ways I found to avoid it and keep his attention was to frequently change subjects and not dwell on any one thing too long. This worked well.

P. Give me an example, please.

M. Here's a typical lesson.

Me. Pointing to the letter S in any book.  
*What's this squiggly looking letter?*

D. S?

Me. *Yes! What sound does S make?*

D. SSSSS

Me. *Yep, you're right. That is an S. Do you know a word that starts with S?*

- D. *Sesame street?*
- Me. *Wow! You've got it! Tell me now, is water a liquid, gas or a solid?*
- D. *I think it's a liquid.*
- Me. *Good. It is a liquid. Is a rock a liquid?*
- D. *Solid.*
- Me. *You're so smart! Now how much is three plus five?*
- D. *Seven?*
- Me. *Whoops. Let's figure it out by counting your fingers.*
- D. *One, two, three, four, five six, seven,*  
*EIGHT!!*
- Me. *Right you are. Do you feel like hibernating now?*
- D. *What's hibernate? (new word and a two minute natural science lesson)*

P. I see how you skipped around from reading, to physics, to math, to science. How did you end a lesson?

M. Usually with an Old Witch story. More about her later.

P. What else?

M. This is something we touched on earlier...GAMES. I learned that if you make learning a fun game, kids will readily absorb whatever you want them to learn. To do this, I invented no end of games. They prevented boredom, provided lots of practice, and gave Daniel the idea that learning is a great joy.

P. Can I digress a bit?

M. Sure, we're almost finished with this chapter.

P. Ellen also said that sooner or later most kids catch up in reading and asked why I was in such a hurry to teach it to Erica now.

M. She said that after you gave her those articles to read? Sigh.

P. I told you she wasn't shuffling with a full deck. She is just not willing to accept new ideas, or what's worse, to at least explore them. Why do you think that is?

M. Because whatever she learned in college went straight to her LTUM as an unshakable gospel truth.

P. Are all educators like Ellen?

M. Let's just say most are. Some of them are open minded, but most others refuse to accept anything new, no matter how much proof is available. Ellen just happens to belong to the latter category.

P. Ellen said something to me about kids having different learning styles. What's she talking about?

M. She's talking about one the latest education fads which is nothing more than educational voodoo.

P. *I gotta hear this.* Oh? Ellen would rip out your tongue if she heard you say that. But why do you believe that?

M. The educational psychobabblists invented that silly notion so they could earn lots of money from parents by "discovering" which learning style their kids used.

P. Isn't that important to know?

M. Not really. If a child learns that a P is a P, what difference does it make how that information was processed and learned? Really Patty, it's a case of making a mountain out of a molehill. Sure, people have

different learning styles. But so what? Most learning, no matter what the style, still boils down to practice.

P. Okay...are we almost done with this chapter?

M. There is one more thing about methodology you must know about and that is phonics. But I'll save that for for a later chapter. You can take a deep breath now -- this chapter is over and done. What you have been waiting for so impatiently for comes next. G'nite Patty.

P. Praise the Lord!

## CHAPTER 5

### READING INSTRUCTION: THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

This is it folks, the beginning of the reading lessons.

P. Hey Marsh. . .I'm raring to get started. But I still can't believe that my Erica can be taught to read.

M. Welcome to the club...very few people believe it. The fact is, it's easier to teach a 2 year old how to read than a 6 year old. Now don't say u r dubious...it's true!

P. <-----dubious.

M. You are seriously underestimating their learning abilities. You still don't realize that our little ones are like fabulous learning machines that deserve our utmost respect. Compared to them, we adults are very dull, maybe even severely retarded.

P. Marsh, this may seem like a silly question...but why do you think Erica should be taught to read? Aren't there other ways to stimulate her brain?

M. There sure are. In fact, let's talk about those other ways right now. For one, classical music is a great stimulant. Bathe the house in music from the day a child is born. Secondly, talk to them a lot from birth on and I do not mean in coochie coo baby talk.

P. How long with the music?

M. Well, at least 4 hours a day and play the same piece about 15 times so that they really learn it.

P. What pieces?

M. Start with the complete works of Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi, Beethoven, Haydn, etc. That'll keep u busy. Hahahaha.

P. :o( That's a bit much Marsh...I am not a classical enthusiast. Also, what should parents talk about? What can babies understand?

M. Nothing yet, but they are always learning English and learning stimulates their minds. Talk slower than normal and use a soothing tone.

P. My sister is still on my case and says she cannot think of one good reason why I should teach Erica how to read. What do you say?

M. I say she is a dingbat developmentalist.

P. MARSH...SHE IS MY SISTER!!! Now give me one good reason.

M. How about 8 good reasons?

P. One would be enough, but go ahead. I am all ears.

M. Here they are:

\* Reading is by far the best brain stimulant there is. Consider reading push ups for the brain. From everything I've learned, nothing will stimulate your child's brain anywhere near as much as reading.

\* Reading is the core, the basic skill for most learning in and outside the classroom. It's role in our lives is crucial. Why not teach it?

\* Next, reading is a pleasure to be shared. Don't think of reading as just an academic

subject. Anyone who has curled up in bed at night with a juicy novel knows that reading is one of life's greatest pleasures. Why not share this pleasure with our children?

\* Nothing I ever did put more fun, joy, and laughter in my life than the time I spent teaching my son how to read.

\* When kids read well and do a lot of it, they turn into independent learners, not dependent on the schools or even their parents to learn. Isn't the ability to learn independently a worthy goal in life?

\* Being your child's first teacher gets you very close to them and them to you.

\* Reading is a wonderful alternative to television and brain boiler video games.

\* Consider that your teaching efforts would be like an inoculation against the disease of reading failure. Nothing will prevent more aggravation than teaching your children how to read because lack of good reading skills is the root of most school failure.

P. <-----Tapping toes and waiting impatiently for the reading lesson to start.

M. Okay!!!! The first step is teaching Erica the alphabet so well that it gets branded forever into her long term unforgettable memory (LTUM). We've discussed that earlier. Using the alphabet on the first two pages of Richard Scarry's *Best Word Book Ever*, I pointed to the letter "A" and . . . here's how the first lesson went with Daniel.

### LESSON #1

M. (With an enthusiastic smile.) *Hey, Daniel, how would like to play the reading game?*

D. He smiles

M. I open the book to the first page which contains the alphabet (or any other book with the alphabet) with both upper and lower case letters and point to the letter A. *Daniel, this is the letter A. This is the big A and that is the little a. Okay? What color is my shirt?*

D *Green.*

M. *You're right! Gosh are you smart! How would you like to sing the alphabet song with me?*

D. *Sure Daddy.* We then sing it for the first of maybe 200,000 times. He never gets bored with it. I do.

M. After the song, I ask him to point to the big letter A and he does. *Great Daniel. That is the big A! Now where is the little a? You're right again. Gosh are you smart! Now where is my nose? What color are my pants? How many noses do you have?*

D. *Brown. One nose.*

M. *Which is your right hand? What color is your hair? Where are your ears? How about an Old Witch story? (See Appendix 2 for a sample story.)*

D. *Yes!*

P. That's it? From just that Daniel learned how to read?

M. Yes Patty, and read very well. Did you notice my enthusiasm and all the praise? I wish you could have seen how often I smiled and animated my face. It's so important not to be a stuffy adult. And, notice how I went over the letter " a" more than once. In future lessons with him, I would continually review that and other letters until I was satisfied that they were in his long term unforgettable memory.

P. Sounds too simple.

M. Sorry Toots, it just happens to be as simple as it sounds. Most of what I will teach you is simple. Would you like me to complicate things?

P. Can I use flash cards to teach Erica the alphabet?

M. Sure. It makes no difference how you teach it, as long as . . .

P. I know. As long as it gets into her LTUM. Right?

M. You're learning. Let's go on. I have now taught Daniel the letter A and we've sung the alphabet song. The second lesson, the next night, is just more of the same.

P. What if I teach her two letters on the first lesson...like the A and the B?

M. Hey, that's fine. These lessons are just broad guidelines..u can change the content and duration of the lessons to suit yourself. Very little here is written in stone. Now here's lesson 2 the next day.

## LESSON #2

Me. *How about the reading game?*

D. *Sure!*

Me. I open up the Scarry book and start by reviewing what he learned the previous day. *Daniel, do you remember the letter A? Show it to Me.*

D. He does it

Me. *YOU ARE RIGHT! Now show me two fingers. Where's your tummy? What color is your shirt? Which way is up? Which way is down?*

D. He responds appropriately

Me. *Boy are you smart! How about another letter? This is a B. Isn't that a neat looking letter? This is the big B and this is the little b. Do you know a word that starts with the letter B. Yes, you are right...bug starts with the letter B. Any other words? Yes, boy is correct! Gosh Daniel, you have such a big and powerful brain!* I now introduce the fact that letters have sounds. *How about a new game Daniel...the sound game.* He never refused a game of any kind.

Me. *Did you know that the B makes a special sound? It's.....bu, like in book, bug...baby. Can you make the B sound?*

D. *Bu*

Me. *Would you say the B sound three times to me? After he does it, we sing the alphabet song.*

P. That sounds like phonics instruction.

M. That's 'cause it is phonics instruction.

P. You weren't kiddin when u said you taught academics. Did u really teach your son phonics that young? How old was he?

M. About 2.

P. Hard to believe this.

M. Tis all true. Scout's honor.

P. How did u get into phonics...I mean, who told u about it?

M. It was my twelve year old daughter who suggested I teach Daniel the sounds of the letters. I thought about her suggestion for a few seconds and

figured, why not? I was in no hurry. Several years later, after I learned more about education in America, I became much more appreciative of her suggestion. Her words put me on the right track and made a huge difference.

P. What is the big controversy about phonics? Could u tell me in just a few words?

M. Nope. Takes longer than a few words to explain. We will get to all that later.

P. Marsh...I am not sure I know enuf about the letter sounds to teach phonics. Am I doomed to failure?

M. No way. Just get Linda Hayward's phonics dictionary and teach Erica the sounds from it. Cutest book u will ever see.

P. Did u use it?

M. No because I did not know about it. One thing...it amazes me how many people are intimidated by phonics because they think it's difficult. Not so...it's really super easy.

P. Everything by you is easy! So how long did it take u to get the alphabet and the sounds into Daniel 's LTUM?

M. Maybe two or three months.

P. Didn't you read stories to Daniel too?

M. I read many stories to him before the lessons started. But afterwards, I wanted Daniel to *read to ME*. As a substitute for reading books to him, I got into something we both enjoyed immensely. I started to tell him the continuing saga of the Old Witch. I considered those nightly bedtime stories much better than any story book.

P. Ellen says I should only read to Erica...that that's all she needs. Erica loves it when I read her a story.

M. Reading to Erica is fine. There's nothing wrong with it.

P. Why do I sense a big BUT coming?

M. Well Patty, it all depends on your goal. If your only intent is to give pleasure to Erica, then go ahead and read to her. But, if your goal is to teach her how to

read and make her much smarter, that's a crocodile with a different set of teeth. Do you remember learning how to ride a bicycle?

P. My dad put me on it and pushed until I got it.

M. Could you have learned by watching others do it? Or by reading about it?

P. Of course not. You have to experience it yourself.

M. Just like reading. You can read to Erica for an eternity and she won't learn to read -- it won't happen.

P. Ellen gave me a magazine article that really lauds reading to your kids. It's mostly about Jim Trelease who wrote the *Read Aloud Handbook*. Here's a quote from the article: "Most people don't believe me when I tell them that reading aloud is the single most important factor in reading success." What do you think about that?

M. I am part of the most people who don't believe him.

P. Then what do you think is the most important factor?

M. It's so obvious. A teacher who knows how to properly teach reading is by far the important factor.

P. So you know more than the experts?

M. Sure do. The so-called experts have caused the reading problem, not me. Trelease's book would never have been written if these so-called experts did the job they were paid to do. Why are you goading me?

P. Sorry.

M. Let's skip a few weeks and go to lesson #10 where we are working on the letter F. For this lesson I will use *The Cat in the Hat Dictionary*. (I call this book the CAT)

P. You used this book a lot?

M. You bet. My son memorized every word in it. Fact is, I wanted him to know every word in every book we read together. That's why we'd read a book over and over again. We only went on to a new book when he could read every word and sentence perfectly. That is important so make a note of it.

P. Does letter size in a book make a difference?

M. Maybe. I'm not sure. During the lessons with Daniel I never noticed him having a problem with smaller letters. His eyes could handle most anything I gave him to read. I think that's one of those things that all depends on the child. We will skip to lesson 10 now.

#### LESSON # 10

Me. *Hey Daniel...want to play the reading game with me again?*

D. *Sure Daddy*

Me. *Do you know how to spell the word toys?*

D. *No Daddy*

Me. *It's spelled T-O-Y-S I repeat it. T-O-Y-S  
Can you tell me how to spell toys*

D. *T-O-Y-S*

- Me. *YES! Wow! (Holding up four fingers)  
How many fingers?*

D. *Four*

Me. *You got it. Now, if I take away one finger,  
how many are left?*

D. *Three?*

Me. *Yessssss. Now, can you spell your name  
for me?*

D. *D-A-N-I-E-L*

Me. SUPER! YOU ARE RIGHT! MY GOSH, ARE YOU SMART! We then review the letters A, B, C, D and E which were covered in the prior lessons. *Daniel, what's a word that starts with the letter A...B...C...D...E...*

D. *Alligator...boy...cat...dog...*

Me. *Super! Now let's talk about the letter F.* I turn to the letter F in the CAT book and point to it. The first word is face. I slowly read the sentence underneath the picture of the bear. Moving over each word slowly, pointing at each word, I read, *Wash your face.* Now, Daniel, can you read it for me?

D. *Wash your face!*

Me. I raise Daniel's arm up high to praise him. *Yep, Daniel, the sentence says, Wash your face. You are right!*

D. Beams

Me. Now lets talk about the sound of the letter

F.

M. In this lesson, I introduced the concept of spelling. I did it with the word toys and the spelling of his first name.

P. How did you explain to him what spelling is?

M. I don't think I ever did. He just got the idea.

P. That's not a very good explanation. :(

M. Hey...there were many things that he just learned by himself through just being exposed. You'd be amazed at how much kids can figure out that way. We will talk more about spelling in the next chapter. Let me summarize. About 4-10 times a day I'd ask him how to spell his name or toys. Later on, after he could read, I'd ask him to spell other words. He liked being constantly challenged.

P. What's next on the agenda?

M. Julie just told me that I forgot to tell you about the little words and sounding out words.

P.. Then tell me about them.

M. Written English contains about 40-50 short words (often called sight words) that are used over and over again. Words like-- it, to, he, I, is, with, etc. Anyway, it's a good idea to teach these words during the time you are teaching the alphabet. You can do it with flash cards. Just make sure the words get into their LTUM.

P. Do you have a list of them?

M. Here they are. I might have missed a few...add to the list if u want to.

THE-ONE-TO-TOO-TWO- IT-AND-BUT-IF-SO-  
HE-SHE-HIM-HER-HIS-WAS-HAS-IS-IN-IF-MY-  
YOU-GO-AS-AN-AT-BE-DO-ME-WHAT-ON-US-  
WHY-BY-SEE-SAW-SAY-CAN-DO-ONCE-WHEN-  
WE-CAN-ARE-THEY-WAS-UP-ME-BUT-NO-  
NOT- PUT-WE-OR-GET-AM-HAS-HAVE-YE-OF-DID-  
YOU-YOUR-SAID-BY-ON-AND-WHO-WHAT

Keep in mind Patty that these little words are very important and should be taught to automaticity...and you know how that's done.

P. PRACTICE-REVIEW-PRACTICE-REVIEW-  
YADDA YADDA YADDA

M. After Daniel thoroughly knew the alphabet, their sounds, and the sight words, I began to teach him how the sounds blended together to make words. First I told him how it worked. I started with simple two letter words like "at" and sound it out...aaaa...ttt...is at. Then I would add a letter ... fffffff ..... aaaaaaaaa ..... tttttttt is fat.

To help, I invented the “sound out game” where I’d give him a word and ask him to sound it out. We played this game a zillion times.

P. Games were sure important in your lessons.

M. Sure were. The most important one was the take turns game. In this game, I’d choose a sentence in any book and then Daniel and I would take turns reading it, word by word or two words at a time, or whole sentences. This game really worked wonders in getting Daniel to practice reading. Plus, hearing him read out loud told me how well he was doing and let me know where he needed help. On page 58 of the CAT book is the sentence, “My child is a lamb.” Here’s how it went:

Me. *How about the take turns game?*  
:o)

D. *Yes!*

Me. I turn to the page and point to that sentence and read it slowly, outloud. “*My child is a lamb.*”  
*Let’s now take turns reading it.*  
*Okay? You first.*

D. *My*

Me. *child*

D. *is*

Me. *a*

D. *lamb.*

Me. *WOW! WE DID IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! :o)*

M. When Daniel first started to read with me during the take turns game, I praised him to no end. I wanted him to know how much I valued reading. Let's continue with lesson #10.

Me. I point out and read all the other F words -- fairy, fall, family, fan, far, farm, fast, fat, father, feather, feed, etc. *What color is the fat bear, Daniel?*

D. *Brown.*

Me. *Okay. What color is the rooster's feather?*

D. *Green.*

Let's skip weeks now of learning the alphabet and go to the 20th lesson. By then, the letters A to O have been introduced, in addition to discussions on the parts of the body, colors, the numbers one through ten, and anything else that might be fun to teach.

## LESSON 20

Me. *How would you like some more of the reading game?*

D. Smiles

Me. *Do you have a big and powerful brain? :o)*

D. *I sure do!*

Me. *Mine is old and lethargic.*

P. Lethargic??? *Is he kidding?*

M. Hahahaha. I knew that word would throw u. During the lessons I frequently used big college level words because I noticed that if I used them, he would too. I introduced them simply by using them in our conversations. To a little kid, the word lethargic is no more difficult to learn than the word dog.

P. Why did you do it?

M. Mostly at first because it was fun to hear him use those words. Then I continued because I realized that a good vocabulary never hurt anyone. Here are a few other "biggies."

verbose	erudite	evolve
sympathetic	bellicose	disconcerted
petulant	melancholy	sagacious
taciturn	hubris	cataclysmic

humongous    ridiculous    jocular  
levity        pensive        decorum  
enthusiasm    fastidious    meticulous  
aggravate    ensnared      egalitarian  
miscellaneous                    democracy

M.     Keep in mind that using such biggies once or twice won't do it. Use the word yourself as part of your vocabulary. In a week or so, she'll start using it too. Let's continue with lesson #20.

Me.    *Do you know a word that starts with A?*

D.     *Alligator.*

Me.    *Okay. How about the letter L?*

D.     *Loquacious.*

P.     Hahaha. Would Daniel really use that word?

M.     Sure, if he knew it and that it started with an L. Don't forget that he had no idea that loquacious is a college level word. Thus he was not afraid to learn or use it. Do you see how his ignorance was often a benefit? I then introduced the letter P in the same manner as the others.

Me. *Here's a P. Do you know a word that starts with P?*

D. *Pink?*

Me. *You got it! Another word?*

D. *Pencil.*

Me. *Okay, which is the capital P?*

D. *Points to it.*

Me. *What is everything in the world made up of?*

D. *Atoms.*

Me. *Can you see an atom?*

D. *No, Daddy, they're too small.*

Me. *Can you show me five fingers?*

D. *He does it*

Me. *Great! Do you know how to spell toys?*

D. *T - O - Y - S*

Me. *Cool. How about the alphabet song? We sing it. Now how about an Old Witch story.*

P. I see that Scarry's book has pages and pages of cute drawings. Did you talk about them too?

M. Sure did. Everything from eggs on the food page, to the pictures of the river, the ships, the fire engines.

Every picture was the source of something to teach Daniel.

P. And the CAT dictionary?

M. Every word taught him something. For example, on page 112 there is the word "teach." It shows a picture of a blue mama bird teaching her kids how to sing. Daniel liked that picture a lot and we discussed it for weeks.

P. I have to leave early tonight. Bridge here tomorrow. Must prepare.

M. You play bridge?

P. Yes, you too?

M. Sure do. Trouble is, I'm still learning it. There's so much I don't know. All those crazy conventions boggle my little brain.

P. See you. G'night Marsh

### **NEXT DAY**

M. Hi, Patty. How was the bridge game?

P. It was canceled. Our friend's car had an embolism and died. Bill and I played gin rummy instead. Then we ordered a pizza. I enjoyed the time alone with my husband.

M. Do you play Scrabble?

P. Bill and I play about once or twice a week. What's your average score?

M. Maybe 350.

P. That's your average? Yipes!

M. I can cook too. :o)

P. LOL. Any other talents?

M. Playing with a yo-yo and growing flowers.

P. Okay -- enough chit chat. Please give me another example using the CAT dictionary.

M. I was planning one -- just to give you an overview of the first five months. After this chapter, we will zoom into more advanced stuff.

P. The lesson please.

M. Okay. *She sounds testy about something.*

Me. *How about the reading game?*

D. *Sure Daddy*

Me *Tell me, how do you spell toys?*

D. *T-O-Y-S.*

Me *Okay. Now how do you spell book?*

D. *B-O-O-K*

Me *Gosh, you sure know how to spell, Daniel! (Turning to page 63 in the CAT book and pointing to the word love.) The mama bear loves her baby just like I love you. Can you spell the word love?*

D. *L-O-V-E*

Me *Is the baby bear sitting on his mother's head?*

D. *No Daddy, on her lap.*

Me. *Do you see the alligator eating his lunch? What color is the lunch box?*

D. *Blue.*

Me. *What's your favorite color?*

D. *Red.*

Me. *Is water a liquid, gas, or a solid?*

D. *Gas.*

Me. *I think water is a liquid. Good try!*  
D. *Okay Daddy, water is a liquid.*  
Me. *Is milk a liquid?*  
D. *YES!!!*  
Me. *What's a larger number 15 or 16?*  
D. *16*  
Me *How about a game of War and then  
an Old Witch story?*

M. Each lesson was like that. I'd first review old material and then introduce something new. Constant practice, constant review. A question and answer, back and forth. After 2 or 3 months of such lessons, Daniel had the alphabet and the numbers 1 - 10 squarely branded into his LTUM, which is exactly what I wanted. Somehow, Patty, I knew this was vital. About that time, I invented the speed game to find out how well he really knew the alphabet and the numbers 1-25.

P. One of your better creations, I suppose.

M. Almost as good as the "mistake" game. The object of the game was for Daniel to name any letter or number that I pointed to as fast as he could. I wanted instant recognition, no hesitancy whatsoever. He reveled in instantly calling out each letter or number as soon as I pointed to it.

P. What if Daniel got one wrong?

M. I'd immediately say "try again!"

P. *He's pressuring Daniel!* Marsh, that sounds like a lot of pressure to me. :(

M. I guess it does sound like that, maybe even a bit frenetic. But Daniel thoroughly enjoyed the competition. As part of the game, he would do the same thing to me - - point out a letter and I'd call out it's name. Related to this game was the "I don't know game."

P. What's the "I don't know" part of the game?

M. I only used it when doing numbers. I'd point to a number such as 7, 9, 12, or 3 and he'd call out what they were. But sometimes I'd show him a number such as 5,301 or 947 -- numbers I knew he didn't know. Then, as fast as he could, he'd call out "I don't know." I'd then smile, letting him know that his answer was proper. I wanted Daniel to know that it was perfectly acceptable to admit that he didn't know something and not feel bad about it. This worked as well as the mistake game, provided tons of practice, and told me how well he knew the basics we'd been working on.

P. <----- Can't wait to try these games with Erica.

M. After about 2 or 3 months of these lessons, Daniel knew the letters of the alphabet and their related sounds as well as he knew his name. Now let's talk about mathematics.

P. <-----Rather talk about death, disease, and pestilence. Marsh, math is not my all time favorite subject. :o(

M. In America very few people like math. However it is a vital subject. Did you notice that math was a part of almost every lesson? During the first five or six months of lessons, I wanted Daniel to first learn the concept of more or less...then counting to 100... then simple addition and subtraction. Much of this was accomplished with the card game War which he simply adored. I can hear myself asking him, "What's more 4 or 7? 9 or 2? What's the number after 22? Is 13 less than 12? Can you count to 10 for me? How much is 3 plus 1, 4 plus 4, 6 take away 2?"

P. Is that it for this lesson?

M. Yep.

P. <----- one very relieved lady

M. Huh?

P. I was so worried that this was going to be complicated. Now I know otherwise. Thanks, Marsh.

M. You're welcome. Good night Patty.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **READING INSTRUCTION: PART TWO**

After six months of instruction, your child:

- \* Thoroughly knows the letters and their phonetic sounds
- \* Knows simple addition and subtraction and can count to 100
- \* Can read and spell many simple little words (is, of, to, etc.) and can read simple sentences
- \* Knows every word in the CAT dictionary by sight and can spell them all
- \* Can sound out many simple words
- \* Knows about many other things you've discussed -- rivers, atoms, forks and spoons, up-down, left-right, some big words such as lethargic, disconcerted, bellicose, verbose
- \* Knows and enjoys many classical music pieces

The above is a just a rough idea of what your child can learn in the first six months given a half hour lesson a day. Invest more time and your child will learn that much more. Moreover, if you did the teaching job correctly,

your child's rage to learn will drive you to drink. He/she will pressure you relentlessly for more and more lessons and games.

M. Hiya Patty...ready for the next lesson?

P. Yes...but I have to tell u something...teaching phonics still sounds hard to me.

M *How do I stop her from thinking phonics is complicated?* Patty, I bet you think I dwelled on phonics and taught Daniel every possible sound and all those crazy exceptions. Right?

P. Didn't you?

M. NO!! I taught him the sounds of all 26 letters and then 15 or 20 vowel and consonant blends. Because he already knew the alphabet to automaticity, it didn't take him long to learn them.

P. Blends . . . sounds icky.

M. What sound does FL make?

P. Fluh . . . like in flunk. That's what you mean by a blend?

M. Yes. Just like BR, CL, CR, FR, SL, TR, TH and many others. Anyway, I didn't have to practice the blends with him extensively. It was really very simple because he already knew the sounds of the letters.

P. You said I must teach to a level of automaticity. What gives here?

M. You're right. I did not teach Daniel all the possible phonic sounds to automaticity. I didn't have to. All I had to do was give him the general idea that letters talked to him and a bunch of examples. After that, his brain figured out the rest. Reading practice was all he needed for that.

P. You are saying that practice taught him ph, str, ck, gn, etc.?

M. That's right. There were a zillion things that he learned through reading practice that I did not teach him. I told you that the human brain is amazingly powerful. Self learning is but one example of its power.

P. When are u going to talk about the phonics controversy? Ellen calls phonics a right wing fascist plot

to destroy the public school system. Why did she say that?

M. It's probably because most home schoolers like phonics and many of them are politically conservative and have no use for some of the voodoo taught in the schools. Personally, I don't blame them.

P. Voodoo? Must u be so insulting?

M. Sorry toots... but I consider classes in death education to be akin to voodoo. That's the kind of garbage now being taught in some schools.

P. <-----changing subject. You once said that you talked a lot to ur son. That impressed me.

M. Yeah, we sure did talk. There were times that he talked so much that I wanted to buy him a muzzle. Kids do have things to say and feelings to vent. I always encouraged him to talk and I listened. It's very important to listen, and to be courteous. For example, if I had to leave the lesson and go to another room, I'd always say, "please excuse me. " Just saying those words was a valuable lesson in courtesy. Now lets talk about plurals.

Me. *Daniel, it's time to talk about plurals.  
You'll like this stuff. :o)*

D. *What's a plural?*

Me. *More than one, that's all. One cat,  
two cats. Do you hear the S at the  
end of cats?*

D. *Yes, Daddy.*

Me. *The S makes it more than one cat.  
Got it?*

D. *:o)*

Me. *Can you make the word kid into a  
plural for me?*

D. *Kids?*

Me. *Yes!!!!!!*

M. I only had to explain plurals a few times.

P. <----- lots of questions.

M. Fire away.

P. I am still thinking about all the English irregularities like the silent B in lamb that we talked about. How did you explain them?

M. If he asked about any of the irregulars, which he didn't often do, I'd just tell him it was one of the "bad

guys." English has lots of irregularities: through - give - gnat - lamb -is-of - know etc. When I was teaching Daniel phonics, we had discussions about these funny irregular bad guys. I just explained that not all words are "good" guys. That there are some "bad guys" which are spelled funny, not according to the rules. He accepted my explanation at face value and that was the end of the problem.

*Me. Do you see the b in lamb?  
That's a silent b and a bad guy. He  
doesn't want to be heard -- he just  
wants to stick his nose in where it  
doesn't belong. Understand?*

D. *Yes, Daddy.*

P. So you didn't explain the irregulars?

M. How could I explain them? How could I explain that "is" should be spelled "iz?" So I didn't try. With lots of reading practice, his young and powerful brain figured out most of the bad guys with little help from me.

P. Got it. What did you do about punctuation?

M. Good question, and one I had to deal with. After we played the take turns game which let me hear him

read out loud, he started to read, but without pausing for commas or periods. After he started to recognize, or sound out, words, I decided he had to know how to pause at the end of a sentence or at a comma. Like toilet training and division, this was not easy to teach.

P. Why the problem with the comma and the period?

M. The comma is just slightly less of a pause than the period. It took a while for him to get the difference.

P. How did you do it?

M. Mainly by reading out loud to him and letting him hear how I paused for the comma and the period. Also, I remember explaining to him how the comma and the period were like policemen, telling him when to slow down or stop. It took several weeks of practice, but he got it.

P. How about the ? and the ! ?

M. No problem. I simply said, "Daniel, the ? asks a question, and the ! means loud or very strong." As for the apostrophe, that came later when I taught him contractions. That'll be in the next chapter. Now it's time to teach you about the magic E.

P. Promises, promises. Oh, Ellen told me that the whole thing about illiteracy in America is way overblown . . . exaggerated. Any thoughts on that?

M. Sure. Tell her to go to her friendly local prison and find out how many of the inmates can't read. That'll keep her quiet for a while. Your sister refuses to admit that America has a massive illiteracy problem because it makes educators like herself look like failures...which they are.

P. Please, don't get on your soapbox! Sorry I mentioned Ellen and her opinions. Just tell me about the magic E. *Me and my big mouth!*

M. By now Daniel knew that vowels had both long and short sounds so introducing the magic E was easy, especially since the Old Witch helped. Here's a lesson that shows how I did it.

Me. *Daniel, I'm going to show you a magic trick that the Old Witch invented. Do you want to learn it?*

D. :o)

Me. *Can you spell the word bit?*

D. *b-i-t*

Me. *Right!! Now, do you know what happens if you put the magic E at the end of bit?*

D. Shakes his head no

Me. *It turns the short "I" into a long "I" sound! Can you imagine such powerful magic? Then I give him several examples:*

rat	rate	not	note
fin	fine	mat	mate
fat	fate	win	wine

Me. *Daniel, do you see how powerful the Old Witch's magic E is?*

D. *Okay, Daddy.*

M. In my many travels in the crazy world of education I once met a third grade teacher in Chicago who asked me (no kidding) how to teach a child how to read the word "give." I couldn't believe a teacher could ask me such a dumb question. She wanted to know why the ending E did not make the i long.

P. Yeah? Well, how did you handle that word?

M. I didn't. It was just another "bad guy" that Daniel figured out for himself. But if he did ask me, I'd just tell him that give sounded like "giv" and it was a bad guy. Why that word caused that teacher problems is beyond me. Now I want to tell you about the mix-up game.

P. Marsh, let's call it quits for the nite. This little mother is feeling lethargic. By the way, how was your revenge Scrabble game last night?

M. <----- was in a good mood 'till you asked. :o( :o( Julie made the word "equating" and hit two triple word scores for 221 points on a single play!

P. So much for revenge. Tomorrow, same time?

M. See you...

P. Bye Marsh

### **NEXT EVENING**

P. Hi there. This mamma is anxious to learn the mix up game. Want some good news?

M. <----- loves good news. :o)

P. I held a class this morning with both my kids. We had a blast!

M. Tell me about it! Am dying to hear!!

P. I didn't have to do anything. Mickey decided to be the teacher and teach Erica!

M. Did he do a good job?

P. It was amazing. His sister was a perfect student. Now Mickey wants to give her a reading lesson every day. I had no idea he would love being the teacher! What's more, Erica adores him. They are so cute together. What's next on the agenda?

M. Contractions and apostrophes.

P. *I would rather talk about toothaches.* Sounds impossible to teach.

M. I did have to think a bit on it. A contraction is really two words meshed into one with the use of the apostrophe to substitute for one letter. That's how I explained it to Daniel.

Me. *Daniel, how would you like to hear some more Old Witch magic?*

D .:o) :o)

Me. *The Old Witch takes a little squiggle that looks like this " ' " and is able to put two words together to make one word. Isn't that amazing? The little squiggle is called an apostrophe.*

Me. *Let's put the words "you" and "will" with an apostrophe. Okay?*

D. Sure Daddy

Me. I showed him you'll on a piece of paper and did the same with he's, it's, your's, I'd, I'm, we're, he'd, she'll, I've and others.

P. That's it?

M. We practiced 'em off and on for a week or so but it was really quite easy to teach.

P. One more question. Do you really think I can teach my kids how to read? <----- having a cold feet attack.

M. If you can't, then it's my fault because I didn't properly teach you how.

P. I understand everything you've said so far . . . it won't be your fault if I mess up.

M. Are you really willing to give Erica some one-on-one quality time? At least a half hour a day?

P. You know I am.

M. Then there is no possible way for you to fail. None. Zilch. Nada. I know this because you have a secret powerful weapon on your side.

P. The Old Witch's magic?

M. LOL! No Patty, your most powerful advantage is Erica's young and powerful brain.

P. Marsh, how well was Daniel reading after a year's worth of lessons?

M. Maybe about the 2nd grade level. By then he was able to spell hundreds of words including those he'd never read or memorized just by sounding them out.

P. So if you asked him to spell "flame," he could do it?

M. Sure. That one is not irregular and has the magic  
E. No problem. There was a daily ritual I want to mention. Every evening after dinner we'd all go upstairs and plop down on our king-sized bed with our own reading material. The whole family called this "reading time." This ritual was very beneficial for several reasons beyond family togetherness, a wonderful reason by itself. It let Daniel know that his parents placed a high value on reading. That's important. It also told him that his parents viewed reading as a pleasurable activity.

P. Did you and Daniel read the same book? And how long did reading time last?

M. No. This was silent pleasure time reading . . . not a lesson. We all read our own reading material. As for how long, usually about a half hour, but sometimes longer. We did not use a clock.

P. Another question -- did you ever teach Daniel grammar . . . the parts of speech?

M. To some extent, but not because it was necessary to his reading skills. I did it for the same reason I taught him about electrons-- to expand his knowledge of the world.

Me. *Daniel, a noun is a person, place, or thing. Can you think of a noun?*

D. *Dog?*

Me. *You're right! Are feet and noses nouns?*

D. *Yes!*

Me. *Yep, they sure are. Other words are called verbs -- they are the words that tell you what is happening -- they are the action words. Walk, sit, run, talk, cook -- those are all verbs. Now listen to this sentence. "The boy ate his lunch." Which word is the noun and which is the verb?*

D. *Boy is the noun. Is ate the verb?*

Me. *Yes! I can't believe how smart you are!*

P. Did you go on to adjectives and adverbs?

M. Sure did, but I stayed away from objects, clauses and other complicated stuff like that.

Me. *Let's analyze a sentence together, Daniel. Okay?*

D. *Sure Daddy . . .*

Me. *"The beautiful Old Witch ran quickly." What's the noun, verb, adjective and adverb?*

P. How does a three or four year old know what the word analyze means?

M. No explanation necessary -- his brain figured it out from the context of the question.

P. Did you teach Daniel handwriting?

M. *She had to bring that up!* You just gave me heartburn. That was one of my mistakes. In a later chapter I'll share with you all those things I did wrong or overlooked.

P. Humility becomes you. :o) What else?

M. Puzzles. They didn't particularly teach Daniel anything (except maybe the puzzles of the U.S. and the world as they relate to geography) but they are a great brain exercise. At first I bought him simple 20 piece puzzles and then we progressed to more complicated ones. Some of the 500 piecers drove me nuts.

P. Especially since your brain is old and lethargic!

M. Let's talk a bit more about spelling, okay?

P. Really Marsh, with spell checkers in computers, is spelling all that important? Who cares?

M. I care. To be fully literate and considered well educated, one must be able to spell correctly. Spell checkers make us dependent on electronics to do our thinking. I don't like that.

P. They save a lot of time. What's wrong with that?  
*Did he just say I was not fully literate?*

M. Patty...everything in our society today seems to be geared for saving time. Instant this and fast that. Quick, fast, faster. It's bizarre.

P. But what if he did not know how to spell a word?

M. Usually I'd tell him to sound it out, or I'd tell him to look it up in a dictionary.

P. Sounds a bit harsh.

M. Sounding words out or using the dictionary made him self reliant and I wanted that. I refused to spoon feed him.

P. Wasn't he a bit too young to teach self reliance?

M. No. It's never too early to learn that in life u must fend for yourself and be self reliant.

P. Were u one of those high pressure fathers?

M. I already told u that he pressured me, not the reverse.

P. Yes you did. Did you ever give Daniel spelling tests?

M. No...not that I can recall. But I did play lots of spelling games like Scrabble and Hangman with him. I guess you could say that those games acted like a spelling test.

Me. *What if the second to the last letter of a word is an "N." Does that tell you anything?*

D. *Uh....don't know.*

Me. *How about a "ING?"*

D. *Yes!*

P. That's very sophisticated for a little kid.

M. Ya gotta hear this story. One day I asked Daniel how to spell the word "whim," assuming he would miss the silent H and spell it wrong. I didn't do it to torture

him. It was a game with us. Much to my surprise, he spelled it correctly and I almost fell over.

P. <----- jumping up and down with glee! But how?

M. I asked him that when I got up off the floor. His reply went straight into my LTUM. "Daddy, I know you and your tricks. I knew it should be spelled w-i-m but I put in a silent H just for you."

P. Hahahahaha! He got you!

M. I was so proud of that dazzling example of reasoning power. Here's another spelling story. One day his nursery school teacher called me with some big news. At this time Daniel was about 4 ½. His teacher had no idea Daniel could read or spell -- remember that I rarely told anyone. She said that Daniel raised his hand and told her the word "Connecticut" was spelled wrong on the blackboard! She looked at the word as spelled and saw that Daniel was right. She then asked Daniel how he knew that and he said, "It's because I have a young and powerful brain!"

P. LMAO!!!!.

M. I often told him that he had a big and powerful brain and that mine was old and lethargic.

P. Hahahhaha What's next? I don't have much time left. What about computers?

M. Computers come later...sorry. Let's call it a night.

P. G'night Marsh

M. See ya Toots...

**NEXT EVENING**

P. San Francisco Mama here!

M. Ready to start?

P. Sure am ...what's on today's agenda?

M. The Mix Up game.

Me. *How about the Mix Up game?*

D. *Okay Daddy, can I go first?*

Me. *Sure.*

D. *Give me a word that uses the letters, n-d-l-a-e-i*

Me. *Hmmm. Let me think... Daniel?*

D. *You're right Daddy! Now give me one.*

Me. *k-o-b-o*

D. *BOOK!*

Me. *You're right! Your powerful brain is at it again!*

D. *My turn. e-l-k-a*

Me. *Like? (This was combining the mix up and the mistake game)*

D. *You blew it Daddy. You made a mistake. It's LAKE!*

Me. *How about the spelling game?*

D. *Okay, you go first.*

Me. *How do you spell bike?*

D. *b-i-k-e.*

Me. *Okay--- about the word loquacious?*

D. *Don't know. Can you help me look up in the big dictionary?*

Me. *Sure -- what are the first two letters?*

D. *L-O*

P. Did you discuss the definition after you found the word?

M. Usually, but not this one. He already knew it.

P. He knew what loquacious meant?

M. It was one of the big words I taught him for fun.

P. How do you play Hangman?

M. Just watch Wheel of Fortune on TV. It's really like the mix up game.

P. Now I remember . . . used to play it when I was a kid. You guess at letters and try to discover the words.

M. Right. That game provided lots of analytical word practice. We played it for years. Let's continue with a lesson.

P. Did you play too?

M. Of course. Daniel went to no end of trouble to fool me. The mere act of thinking about a phrase gave his brain lots of reading and spelling practice. I also had fun with synonyms as you can see.

Me. *Daniel, do you know some synonyms for the word hate?*

D. *Despise, loath, dislike . . .*

Me. *Cool! How about the word big?*

D. *Gigantic, large, huge, enormous, humongous*

Me. *:o) :o) :o) How about colossal?*

D. *I forgot that one.*

Me. *But look at all the ones you got right! :o)*

D. *:o)*

Me. *How about contractions. What's another way to say you will?*

D. *You'll?*  
Me. *Wow! You're right. How about these: it's, she's, you've*  
D. *It is, she is, you have,*  
Me. *I raise his arm in triumph. How do you spell wood?*  
D. *W-O-O-D*  
Me. *Is that all?*  
D. *W-U-O-L-D*  
Me. *Almost. It's would. Please spell it again.*  
D. *W-O-U-L-D.*  
Me. *Great!*  
D. *Daddy, I feel lethargic. Can I have an Old Witch story?*

P. How did you find out if he was comprehending what he was reading?

M. That was easy. I did it with the "do it" game. On a piece of paper I'd print out some instructions like "close your eyes and stick out your tongue." Then I gave him the paper and told him to "do it." When he stuck out his tongue, I knew that he was reading for meaning. I never figured out a better way to test his comprehension.

P. When is the Old Witch chapter coming? I want to meet this lady already.

M. Soon -- hang on.

P. So what's for tomorrow?

M. Daniel's reading and IQ test.

P. Oooooo sounds interesting! See you tomorrow.

M. G'nite Patty.

#### **NEXT DAY**

P. Hi Marsh!

M. Hi Patty! I have some interesting things to chat with you about tonight.

P. The reading test?

M. Yes. When Daniel was about 4 ½, I took him to a local Sylvan learning center for an evaluation of his reading skills. It cost me \$80.00. The person who tested him said that Daniel was a great reader and was reading at the fourth grade level. She asked me what teacher taught him. When I said I did it, she kind of frowned.

P. Huh?

M. She didn't want to hear that.

P. Probably because you are a mere parent with no official certification. Right?

M. You got it. Soon after that I had Daniels's IQ tested too, just out of curiosity. Since there no IQ designed for four year olds, they gave him one designed for 2nd graders.

P. Didn't he object to all this testing?

M. Not a bit. He probably thought they were just more games. The kid loved challenges.

P. Results?

M. They told me he has a 148 IQ

P. That's above genius . . .

M. That's what early brain stimulation does.

P. Yes, you said that a million times. I got the message.

M. Julie just reminded me to tell you about a Newsweek (6-96) article that you should read. The cover story is, "Your Child's Brain." It says a lot about the "open window"... the preschool years when the brain soaks up information like a sponge. It also attacked

educators because they do not know about any of this - that their thinking is still in the 18th century.

P. Ellen would love that....hahahahaha

M. What else would you expect? Now let me tell you about serendipity learning which means that my teaching was not limited to our special evening lessons. We might be driving in the car, walking to the grocery store, or eating lunch and I'd blurt out:

Is milk a liquid, gas or a solid?

What is  $3 + 6$ ?  $9 \times 7$ ? 10 divided by 2?

What is the sound of the letter P?

What's bigger a fried egg or an electron?

How do you spell your name?

If you add the numbers on the license plate in front of us, what do you get?

What is the name of that gas station?

What's an antonym of enormous? Can you spell enormous?

What's 4 to the 2nd power?

What's a galaxy?

This was always very informal and lots of fun.

P. Did Daniel ever ask you questions?

M. Yes, all the time. He especially wanted to know what I did when I was a little boy. That intrigued him. I have since learned that that's not unusual, that kids are very interested in what adults did when they were kids.

P. What did you tell him about your childhood?

M. I told him that I just loved reading books and going to the library...things like that. I knew that whatever his Daddy did as a little boy would surely be something he'd want to do. Hence, he grew up thinking that reading is wonderful and that the library is a fun place to go. Let's sum up by saying that such "anytime" learning conversations gave me an opportunity to get Daniel to review and practice what he'd already learned, to teach him morals, ethics, good behavior and introduce him to new ideas.

P. Bill is grumbling for attention. One more thought . . . how did you choose a good school for Daniel?

M. *Another painful subject.* I didn't. Every school he went to was either infantile or just plain rotten. We'll talk more about this later too. In brief, once you create a Wonderkid, you'll find you've created a few problems for yourself in the school department.

P. Problems with no solutions?

M. No Patty. There are solutions. You'll see. Well, that's the end of this chapter and the reading instruction lessons. I hope I didn't miss anything crucial.

P. I doubt it. Now what's on for tomorrow?

M. Math.

P. **OH NO!!!**

M. *Something tells me she's somewhat less than thrilled. Patty!*

P. I can't help it. Compared to math, I was a star in spelling. Are you going to tell me that I was poor in math because I was mistaught?

M. Of course I am...we all were. G'night Patty.

P. G'night Marsh.

## CHAPTER 7

### MATH . . .OH NO!!!

Math is a subject that makes millions of Americans cringe. It is curious that people who do not feel comfortable with math will freely admit it to anyone. They sometimes almost burst with pride, as though they were members of an exclusive club -- the Math Wimps of America. Why does this club and the negativity about math exist? Read on folks and find out.

M. Hiya Patty....all ready for this chapter? *Hahahaha*.

P. Yeah...just had two vodka tonics. All set. Marsh, I hope that this is not going to be a long painful lesson.

M. The one about our educational system will be worse.

P. Marsh, Erica is only a toddler! You can't teach math to a 16 month old!

M. Tell that to Glenn Doman, the guy who wrote the book, *Teach Your Baby Math*.

P. What does it teach...simple stuff like more or less?

M.. A bit harder...addition, subtraction and multiplication.

P. I suppose you expect me to believe this. Do you believe it?

M. Why would I not believe it? The man who wrote the book is no charlatan, and besides...I told you that I never underestimate little kids' amazing learning abilities. I am not surprised in the least bit. As for you believing it, I asked you to keep an open mind. First read the book and then decide if it is hokum.

P. Do you want to hear the latest on Ellen?

M. *She'll talk about anything rather than math.* Not really Patty, I've already had a bad case of heartburn today.

P. What caused it...your usual hotdogs?

M. Not this time. I had a glorious italian beef sandwich as they only make in Chicago. Nuttin like 'em on earth. Now let's do math.

P. Okay, let's start...I have to hear how you you'd teach math to a 16 month old.

M. First of all, teaching math is not one iota different than teaching reading. The methodologies which you've already learned apply --- automaticity, practice and review, praise.

P. <----- dubious.

M. Patty, can you count to 100? Do you know what  $2 \times 9$  is?  $4 + 6$ ?  $10 - 5$ ?

P. *Here we go again...*Don't be ridiculous. Of course I do.

M. Then you know enough to teach math to Erica.

P. I'm listening.

M. You start by teaching Erica the basic foundation: numbers, their values, and counting to 10. Start the process with your fingers. Hold up one finger and say, "This is one finger." Then do the same for two to five fingers. In a week or so, she'll get the idea. Then ask her how many noses or ears she has. How many plates are

on the table. How many toes are on her right foot. Is that so hard to do?

P. Sounds easy enough.

M. Once Erica knows what the numbers 1-5 stand for, you can go on to 10. You do that by playing the counting game. Using my fingers again, I'd count, one by one, until I reached ten. Sometimes, I'd use match sticks or pennies instead of my fingers.

P. For how long did you do this?

M. Until he could count to 10 thoroughly, without mistakes, and understood that numbers stand for a definite quantity. Maybe two or three weeks -- kids learn quickly. He learned number recognition during the time I was teaching him the alphabet. Remember how I skipped around? Let me illustrate this in a sample lesson.

Me *How about a math game?*

D. *Okay.*

Me *Can you count to five?*

D. *1-2-3-4-5*

Me *Good, now show me two fingers.*

D. He does it

Me    *You're right!*

I'd then point to the number 4 (from a page in a book or a playing card) and tell him that this is a 4. I then hold up four fingers and continue with other numbers.

P.    From this Daniel learned mathematics?

M.    That was the beginning! Mathematics, no matter how advanced, is based on simple numbers.

P.    Did you use playing cards?

M.    More extensively than you can imagine. Keep reading, you'll see why and how.

P.    Okay. Let's say Erica can count to ten and recognizes those numbers. What's next?

M.    Teach her how to play WAR. Cards are a wonderful tool for teaching the concept of more or less and number recognition.

P.    The game is boring! I used to play it when I was a kid.

M. Erica will think the game is the greatest thing since pepperoni pizza. Little kids do not get bored when playing games with their parents...they love the attention. There is no chance that War will bore her.

P. *Pepperoni pizza...when is this guy going to learn to eat quiche?* Did you pretend to lose?

M. No, not this game. That's because WAR is all luck and Daniel must win legitimately about 50% of the time. We played WAR for several months. I remember how Daniel used to squeal with joy when his 9 beat my 8. Daniel loved to win and WAR gave him that opportunity.

P. Did you use an ordinary deck of cards?

M. Yes, with one modification. With a colored ink pen I wrote the number "11" on the Jacks, "12" on the Queens and "13" on the Kings. Then came addition.

P. Addition already...for a little kid?

M. Patty, you are underestimating Erica again. Addition is easy for a two or three year old. You simply teach the concept with your fingers. Show Erica one finger from your right hand. Then show her one from

your left hand. Then say, "one finger, two fingers." Like this:

Me. *Daniel, if I put both fingers together, how many fingers do I now have?*

D. *Two fingers.*

Me. *Great! That's called addition. Do you like this new addition game?*

Continue playing this addition game with  $2+1$ ,  $3+2$ , gradually going for higher numbers up to 10. I sometimes used the word "add," other times "plus."

P. Let me guess. You did the same for subtraction, right?

M. You got it. But I only introduced subtraction after he thoroughly understood the concept of addition. I just introduced the "take away" concept. I'd hold up four fingers and say, "What if I take one away? How many are left?" To acquaint him with math lingo, I'd often substitute "minus" or "subtract" for "take away."

P. It all sounds so easy but Erica, I must remind you, is just 16 months, not yet 2. Does that make a difference?

M. I am not sure. Maybe you will have to spend some extra time with her. Like most everything else, play it by ear. But no matter what, it cannot hurt to stimulate her mind at her age or even much younger. No effort on your part is in vain or a waste.

P. Marsh, u make everything sound so easy.

M. That's because it is easy, especially if you compare it with all the other things Erica's brain was doing at the same time. During this math instruction, Erica's brain will be busy running the factory (all bodily functions), learning English by listening to you talk, and no end of other things. When you consider those things, addition and subtraction become mere footnotes to the brain's list of cerebral accomplishments. Never underestimate God's generosity. Most of us squander this gift and don't really appreciate it.

P. Give me a time frame on addition and subtraction.

M. I'm not sure. Maybe we played with addition for two months and then another month with both addition and subtraction.

P. Did Daniel ever get them mixed up?

M. Never. Then, after six or seven months of counting, number recognition, simple addition and subtraction, and WAR, I wanted to get more sophisticated. Frankly, I was getting bored with the easy stuff. I remember wracking my brain for a way to teach more sophisticated math.

P. I gather you found a way.

M. Well, I figured that if Daniel liked WAR so much, I'd continue with playing cards. I remembered a game my father taught me when I was a teenager called CASINO. Often played by gambling sailors to whittle away the long hours at sea, Casino involves simple addition up to 10. I knew Daniel could handle that.

P. Did he like it?

M. If he ate up WAR, you might say he gorged on Casino. I was so happy I had found a game that was fun to play, easy to teach, had many strategic nuances, and above all, really made him think. Casino really bathed his brain in mathematics. What more could I want?

P. Did you let him win at this game?

M. Sometimes, when we first started. But because the game is at least 50% pure luck, he often whipped me legitimately.

P. What about the 50% skill factor?

M. I'm glad you asked that. To the novice player, the game appears to be simple. But seasoned players know that to win consistently one needs a good memory and good powers of deductive reasoning. I was very interested in both of those skills.

P. How old was Daniel when you started teaching him Casino?

M. About three.

P. So you taught your innocent little three year old how to gamble? Shame on you!

M. In this case, the end justified the means. After playing Casino for about six months, long enough for him to really understand the rules, I had a brainstorm. I figured that if this game could provide Daniel with so much addition practice, why not change the game a little and incorporate subtraction as a new rule?

P. Did he go for that?

M. Whew, did he! Because he already understood addition, he was able to use it immediately. Now I knew I was on to something with Gotcha!

P. Gotcha?

M. Daniel and I renamed Casino. We played Gotcha! for several months. I then figured if the new subtraction rule worked so well, why not introduce some more new rules -- multiplication, division, powers, and negative numbers? I was on a roll!

P. You taught Daniel powers too? *Ye gads!*

M. Gotcha! did not teach Daniel how the new rules worked. I had to do that. But, once I explained it, Gotcha! took over and gave Daniel tons of math practice. Moreover, the game taught Daniel the interrelationship of the four arithmetic functions. Patty, it's a marvelous math game without peer.

P. Okay Marsh, how did you teach him multiplication, division?

M. Multiplication was surprisingly easy to teach. I patiently explained that multiplication was just another

way of adding the same number over and over again. That means that  $3 \times 2$  is the same as adding the number 2 three times. He got it in a few days. When he started using multiplication as a new rule in Gotcha!, his understanding and use of it increased significantly.

P. How about division?

M. That division function was much more difficult to teach than multiplication. Here's one approach:

Me. *How many times can you fit three pieces of pie into a pie that has six pieces?*

D. Two?

Me. *You got it, kiddo! If you had two pieces of pie, how many times could you put that into the pie?*

D. Three?

Me. *You got it! Wow are you smart!!*

P. How did u teach powers?

M. Oh...that was really very easy to teach. Take two to the third power as an example. That's simply multiplication in disguise:  $2^3 = 2 \times 2 \times 2$ . Don't get the idea that the other math functions were introduced in a

few weeks. It happened quite slowly. For example, we practiced multiplication, which Daniel thought was great fun, for at least four months before moving on to division. I was in no hurry.

P. *Multiplication fun?...he's a dreamer.* C'mon Marsh, there is nothing about math that is fun.

M. Your attitude on math leaves more than a little to be desired. :o(

P. Okay, tell me how to do multiplication in Gotcha!

M. Sure. Say that Daniel's cards indicate he must create the number 10. He first tries to do that using addition and subtraction which fail. But when he tries multiplication, he sees an eight on the playing field and an eight in his hand and triumphantly puts one eight on top of the other and says, "building tens."

P. An 8 and an 8 equals 10? Not even a CPA can do that.

M. Hahahahahaha. What is  $8 \times 8$ ?

P. 64.

M. What's the sum of the digits 6 and 4?

P. I get it.

M. So you see, in one calculation Daniel had to use both his knowledge of multiplication and addition. He loved doing it and I loved watching him do it. Patty, even math can be lots of fun if it is presented as part of a game. You must remember that Daniel had no idea, not even a clue, that he was learning something that so many people fear and despise. He thought he was just playing another game with his Daddy.

P. Marsh, if Gotcha! is as good as you say, why don't you box it sell it to the world?

M. Sure, yeah, someday.

P. You sound a bit less than thrilled with that idea.

M. <-----no use for the business world

P. Why? Aren't you a CPA?

M. Was a CPA. Past tense. :o(

P. What happened?

M. I was not suited for that line of work so I quit.  
Let's talk about something else...ok?

P. Ok...but could you send me something on  
Gotcha!?

M. Thanks to Julie, I do have the rules typed up. I'll  
send 'em to you tomorrow. But you'll have to make the  
cards yourself. Hey, let me tell a little story about what  
Gotcha! did for Daniel? As Daniel's kindergarten teacher  
related the story to me, the class was talking about the  
number five. Daniel then announced that a five is not  
just a five. She asked him to explain. "Well," he said, "a  
five is also  $4+1$ ,  $6-1$ ,  $10$  divided by  $2$ ,  $5 \times 1$ , and the  
square root of  $25$ !"

P. Yikes!!!!

M. I told you Patty, Gotcha! really works. Let's move  
on. Here's another math story. It's about a math teacher  
named John Saxon. As the story goes, he was most  
unhappy that most of the students in his class performed  
miserably on the final exam. He couldn't understand  
how that could happen in view of the fact that the  
students performed so well during the year but did

miserably on the final. The poor fellow wondered what happened and made it his life's mission to find out.

P. So what happened? Bottom line.

M. Didn't your mother ever teach you to be patient?

P. Bill asks me that all the time. C'mon Marsh, tell me.

M. Hold on. I have a bit more to explain. You recall how math text books are organized? The first chapter may be on fractions, the next on percentages, then whole numbers, and so on. At the end of each chapter you are tested on the material in that chapter.

P. That's how I remember it.

M. Saxon then added a little twist and came up with the magic bullet

P. What is it already? ZZZZZ!

M. Unless kids get the basic info into their LTUMs, they will FORGET the material over time.

P. Tell me something I don't already know. *That's the magic bullet?*

M. By the time students got to the last chapter of that math book, they forgot much of the material that was presented in prior chapters months earlier. Saxon prevented that from happening by forcing his students to constantly review old material. This constant weekly review worked to assure that all the year's material went into their LTUM. That means they learned the entire year's material so well that they couldn't forget it even if they wanted to.

P. Did he teach the same stuff over and over?

M. Not exactly, but you're close. When Saxon introduced a new subject or concept, it was only done in the context of the previously learned material. Thus, nothing new was ever taught in isolation. For example, a chapter that introduced fractions might be taught with and compared to decimals or percentages learned in an earlier chapter. Thus, students were constantly being forced to review old material. Here is the genius part of this constant review of old material. On every test during the year, there were test questions on old material. Thus students knew they had to constantly review and refresh their memories on the old stuff in order to pass

the tests. That's why they could not forget...the knowledge was branded into their LTUMs.

P. It reminds me of the way you taught Daniel how to read. Practice and review, practice and review. Why don't educators do this?

M. Because they are stupid. Saxon knew he was on to something so important that he wrote math texts incorporating his system. He even established a publishing company to assure they'd get published. Many schools now use his books.

P. Why don't all schools use his books, or at least his methodology?

M. Ignorance, incompetency, empire building -- the same old stories. There's one more important factor to all that practice and review you should know about.

P. I'm listening.

M. Once kids really understand all of the arithmetic functions and have 'em in their long term memory, they begin to see how those functions are interrelated. That's when they can get creative with math.

P. You're suggesting that their brains then work at a higher level of sorts?

M. Yes, that's it. Knowing the basic facts to high level of automaticity frees 'em to think conceptually and creatively. That's how mathematicians are created. Do you now understand the importance of this?

P. I think I hear it pretty loud and clear. What about schools that supply kids with hand held calculators?

M. They're just wonderful. Saves kids no end of computation and thinking time.

P. I smell a rat.

M. You are getting to know me too well! A calculator robs students of the opportunity to think mathematically by doing the thinking for them. Schools that ascribe to this practice are not doing their students a favor. It's another example of educational malpractice.

P. I probably shouldn't ask, but what else do the schools do wrong?

M. In teaching math, their whole methodology is upside down, just as in reading. The educators like to

say, "we teach children how to solve problems . . . how to think creatively and critically." Sounds good, right?

P. Yes, what's wrong with that?

M. Nothing as long as the basic skills are taught FIRST. That's the crucial step the educators gloss over. If they taught kids the basic skills to a very high level of mastery, using the practice and review, students would be fully prepared for problem solving. It's the same story in reading where basics are not taught to mastery. *They will never learn. Sigh*

P. What can I do about Mickey's poor math grades?

M. You never told me Mickey was having problems in math.

P. Well, Bill is a math wimp too so I figured . . .

M. That math wimpiness is inherited? LOL! Patty, nothing could be further from the truth. There's no such thing as a math wimp gene. If Mickey is getting poor grades, it's most likely because he is being mistaught. Read my lips . . . MISTAUGHT. Say it.

P. Mistaught.

M. Louder, with feeling.

P. MISTAUGHT!! Meanwhile, what can I do about it?

M. Teach him Gotcha! and send him to a Kumon math center. That'll do the trick.

P. <----- still thinking about being mistaught. :( See you tomorrow night, Marsh.

#### **NEXT EVENING**

M. Hi Patty!

P. <----- rotten mood. Went to see Mickey's math teacher about his grades. She gave me a long diatribe that I still don't understand. I think she was blaming television, too much sugar in his diet, our social order and who knows what else.

M. Everything and anyone but the real cause, themselves and their idiotic methodologies. Educators sure know how to wiggle. Did you know that math is much easier to teach than reading?

P. I smell a trick here.

M.. No tricks. What does  $2 + 2$  equal?

P. Four, obviously.

M. Is the answer ever 3 or 5 or  $4 \frac{1}{2}$ ?

P. Of course not. Two plus two always equals four.

M. Now, what's the sound of the letter A?

P. It depends -- it makes a different sound in different words.

M. Precisely. The letter A makes a different sound in the words father and male. But two plus two is always four. The point is, math is exact. Reading and spelling (especially in English) is not. That makes math much easier to teach and to learn.

P. I'll accept that. Are we done yet?

M. I just thought about Miss Brandt, my third grade teacher. Miss Brandt weighed about 1000 pounds give or take an ounce. At least that's how she appeared to me long ago. She ran her classroom as if she'd taken

lessons from Attila the Hun. If one was foolish enough to talk out of turn, throw spitballs, or giggle, one was swiftly and mercilessly punished. One punishment was to make the transgressor write the math tables ten trillion times.

P. Are you still angry at her about that?

M. Hardly. Now I understand that Miss Brandt (may God give her a condo in Hawaii for her wisdom) had more on her mind than punishment. She knew that her technique would get the multiplication tables into our LTUMs. She was doing us a favor and. That kind of drill and practice was one way to learn the multiplication tables to a level of automaticity. What do you think about algebra and equations?

P. About as much as I think about anchovies.

M. What about prime numbers?

P. <----- wouldn't know a prime number from a side of beef. Why are you asking me these questions?

M. When Daniel was five, I asked him to solve the equation, 2 times x equals four. Without hesitation, he

immediately gave me the correct answer. That's how I introduced him to algebra.

P. What's the point?

M. That algebra is also easy to teach to little kids. Because Daniel had the basic math skills and an open mind, he was readily able to understand what we adults incorrectly assume is too difficult for young children.

P. Geometry too?

M. Yes, that too, although geometry is easier to teach than algebra.

P. I always thought it was impossible.

M. Teaching division was almost impossible. Geometry, by comparison, was easy because it is not an abstraction like algebra. A student can see geometric shapes and that makes quite a difference.

P. Got any more thoughts about math?

M. A few. Last night I had another thought about the multiplication tables.

P. I know. Kids must learn them to automaticity, right?

M. No. I know that my constant harping taught you that already. I just wanted to remind you of the True-False-I Don't Know game. This game works real well with math too. Here's an example.

Me. *4 x 4 is 16. True or false?*

D. *True.*

Me. *10 equals 5 x 2?*

D. *True.*

Me. *2 x 5 is 12?*

D. *False --*

Me. *3 squared is 10.*

D. *Nope...it's 9.*

Me. *WOW ARE YOU SMART!!!!!!!*

As fast as he could, Daniel answered my rapid fire questions.

Me. *6 x 6 is 36.*

D. *True.*

Me. *4,300 x 5,123 is 20,000.*

D. *I don't know.*

Me. *That's okay*

Here I combined the speed game with the I don't know game.

P. Are you done with this chapter now?

M. Was it really all that much torture?

P. Bill wants to know more about your Kumon recommendation for Mickey. What do they do?

M. They give kids a tremendous amount of basic skills practice and then test their abilities by timing them. The kids must attain certain speeds before the Kumon people are satisfied that they really know the material. It's like the speed game I played with Daniel.

P. Are they expensive and where are they?

M.. No, they are not expensive, and they are located in most big cities. But isn't it a shame that they even exist? I mean...if the schools were doing what we paid them to do and taught the basics to a high level of automaticity, Kumon would not exist nor would Saxon be selling his text books. G'nite Patty.

P. What on for the next lesson?

M. Computers...the Old Witch... and a bunch of other miscellaneous stuff.

P. Nite nite.

## CHAPTER 8

### OTHER MATTERS THAT MATTER

This chapter covers miscellaneous material I could not figure out where else to place.

P. Hiya Marsh. Patty2kids reporting for duty.

M. Have we met before? *Hehehehe*.

P. Yes, I am the lady with the nutty fuzzy headed sister who thinks you are lower than a Bulgarian bed bug.

M. Oh....you are that lady! Now we are going to zoom into the 21st Century, to the world of the computer and Cyberspace. Today we may think that the computer dominates our lives but what is going on today is hardly a drop in the bucket compared to what the future will bring. In ways we cannot yet imagine, computers will change the way we live, play, learn, and do business. Like 'em or not, these guys are here to stay.

P. Now, how did you get Daniel interested in computers?

M. I didn't do a thing. But when he was about 4, he came with me to Radio Shack to buy batteries and saw some kids playing a game on one of those small, inexpensive computers they used to sell back then. He then let me know that he couldn't live another day without one. Since the gizmo was only \$69, I indulged him, took it home and plugged it in. VOILA! My little boy entered the 21st century.

P. Did you show him how to work it?

M. Well, I plugged it in, gave him the manual that was in the box, and then let his brain run with the ball.

P. *My mentor is some teacher!* That's teaching?

M. If you can call yourself a math wimp, I can call myself a computer wimp.

P. Is that an excuse?

M. Hold it Patty. You've got this all wrong. The best thing I ever did with Daniel and his computer education was to offer him little help. Remember that by now he was fully capable of reading. I figured he could learn how to work it by himself. He knew that if he was ever

going to enjoy his new toy, he'd have to do his own learning.

P. *He's rationalizing.* Marsh -- that sounds harsh to me.

M. <----- won't accept that. Patty, do you remember the concept of self reliance we talked about earlier?

P. Sure.

M. Remember how I constantly said to Daniel, "Look it up . . . sound it out?" This was just another way to make him a self-learner and self reliant. Think back to Ibuka's ideas on the matter of self-learning we talked about earlier?

P. But you can't do that with all kids.

M. You're right. But our discussion is not about all kids. It's about Wonderkidz. They're special.

P. Then what happened?

M. For the next few days I hardly saw him. He was holed up in his room reading and fiddling with the gizmo, programming in BASIC.

P. He taught himself how to program in BASIC?  
That's for adults!

M. Not so. In a month or so he was working with loops and if-then clauses, whatever they might be. Then came the electronics. He became a mascot at the Radio Shack store. He reveled in all the resistors, transistors, and electronic books. Soon his "office," as he called his bedroom, started to resemble the command room at Cape Canaveral.

P. LOL! You bought him all that stuff?

M. Most anything he wanted. In six months he had his little color computer hooked up to a VCR, stereo, telephone, and no end of other gadgets.

P. Wasn't it expensive?

M. Not really. The VCR, and stereo were from garage sales. But even if it was expensive, I would have gladly shelled out the bucks. I considered that money to be an investment in his education. I was buying him part of the solid foundation that would serve him for a lifetime. Even then, I knew the vast importance of computers. I didn't want my son to be a computer wimp

like his Daddy. It is far better to spend a small amount of money when they are young, then a lot later after the problems of miseducation set in.

P. Do you recommend a Radio Shack color computer for Erica?

M. Radio Shack no longer sells them. It was a wonderful little machine and as an inexpensive introduction to computers, it had no equal. He even found AOL.

P. Tell me about Daniel and AOL.

M. Daniel subscribed to a computer magazine called Rainbow. That's where he first got wind of AOL. In a week or so, he had his first modem and I signed him up with AOL. I soon noticed that he was cackling with laughter and typing like a madman for hours on end.

P. <----- waiting for the scoop on the bill.

M. I asked him what he was doing and he said, "talking to my girlfriends." That's when I got a bit concerned.

P. Who were his girlfriends or shouldn't I ask? *Uh oh.*

M. That's the part that's really a kick. Seems that my CyberKid found two women over 30 to chat with and don't even ask, it wasn't about sex. His girlfriends were real ladies and mothers too. One was even an AOL on-line hostess.

P. Did they know they were chatting with a 7 year old?

M. Nope. They thought Daniel was in his middle teens by his writing style. Boy, were they later surprised!

P. He could write that well at age 7?

M. Apparently. Now you know why I didn't melt his modem when I got the \$200 charge on my Visa.

P. TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS!!!!

M. In those days, it was much more expensive to be on AOL. But, I was reveling in all the typing and writing and reading practice he was getting. Because of his time on AOL, his writing skills vastly improved. Practice does that.

P. You've made that point about 10,000 times already!!

M. I then asked him to teach me about this strange new world he discovered. In short order, I got addicted too and the bills rose accordingly, but I really didn't care. Daniel and I were now netsurfing together. It was really special to have this exciting new world in common. Can you imagine -- we both had the same adult friends?  
"Hey, Dad, get any E-mail from Fran today?"

P. He did all this on a little \$69 computer?

M. No. I later bought him a much more powerful computer. How about a little story now?

P. Yes!

M. One day, maybe when he was about seven, Daniel told me he was going to figure out a computer program that would predict if a number is prime or not.

P. <----- no comprende.

M. A prime number is one that can only be divided by itself and the number one.

P. Who cares?

M. Mathematicians care. For hundreds of years they have been trying to figure out such a formula to predict whether a number is or isn't prime. That's what Daniel said he was trying to do.

P. Did he?

M. If he had, Harvard would have made him a professor. He failed, as I knew he would. However, I sure enjoyed watching him try. He worked on it for days, exercising his brain to the max.

P. Tell me about the software you bought. Did you buy him some games?

M. Some, but not many. I did buy him a wonderful program called LOGO. It's actually a computer language invented for kids by an M.I.T. professor. I tell u Patty this is a program u must have. It teaches kids everything --- computer programming, word processing, geometric design, logical thinking skills, and spacial intelligence. It's easy enough for a three year old and it can be hard enough to befuddle an adult. I remember trying to figure out how to use the variable function. It

drove me nuts watching Daniel smoothly using variables while I struggled.

P. Expensive?

M. A little. About \$100, but well worth it. You really cannot afford not to own it.

P. Something tells me I should buy my kids their own computer rather than let them use mine.

M. Good idea. Get them a cheap used one to learn on and be sure to teach them to respect it -- no food, gum, drinks or banging.

P. What software besides Logo?

M. The people who write computer software are some of the most creative people on earth. The programs available are wonderful -- there are even phonics programs. Be aware that AOL has a zillion kids programs you can download free.

P. What if Erica is afraid of the computer?

M. There is no chance of that happening. Kids adore and have a natural love of computers. Little kids do not

fear the unknown as adults do. To them, everything is new and they revel in discovery.

P. Our library has lots of computer programs. :o) Borrowed one for Mickey called Where in the World is Carmen San Diego by Broderbund software and Math Blaster by Davison. Now please tell me about the Old Witch!

M. The Old Witch saga was a very long series of bedtime stories that I made up as I told them. All of them had the same characters with the Old Witch being the central character. Daniel was in every story as the little boy who loved her. After each lesson, Daniel said, "Daddy, please tell me an Old Witch story and make it interesting and exciting!" I have no idea where the Old Witch came from -- she just popped into my head one day. For about six years this lady and all her buddies were a very important part of Daniel's life, and mine too. At first, my only interest was to please Daniel with bedtime stories. Over time, however, my reason for continuing the ongoing saga changed. This 310 year old lady became a wonderful teaching tool.

P. How long were the stories and what were they about?

M. In the beginning, the stories were short -- maybe five to ten minutes. But as time passed, they became longer and more complicated...often lasting a half hour. The stories were that engrossing for both of us.

P. So what were they about?

M. They were about the Old Witch and all of her somewhat unconventional friends. The subject of each story, which sometimes continued for days, could be about anything -- income taxes, illiteracy, saying please, cleanliness.

P. Why didn't you just read stories to Dani

M. The Old Witch stories were much better than *Go Dog Go* and I soon learned the joys of being a storyteller. My stories were infinitely more interesting than any kids' books I've ever seen on the market. Show me a kid's book that talks about income taxes, telepathy, Newton, intergalactic trade agreements, and Hypatia.

P. Marsh...your stories sound a bit too adult for little kids.

M. No, they weren't. If you explain adult ideas and concepts in a logical way, the kids will pick up on them.

Remember...adults fear the unknown, not kids. Kids gobble up new ideas because to them almost everything is new.

P. Who's Hypatia?

M. Historically, Hypatia was the last curator of the Alexandrian library in ancient Egypt. The Old Witch and the Wizard brought her back to life with their magic powers to become the historian and librarian in the Old Witch's house.

P. How did you make up the stories? Six years equals about 2000 of them.

M. I just let my imagination run amok. But Daniel helped. You don't think he just listened, do you?

P. Well, yes.

M. That's not how it was. These stories were interactive. If Daniel didn't like a story line he'd suggest an alternative. "Oh, Daddy, that's not what Rumple did. I think he got into the Wormhole Express and traveled to Questar in the Andromeda galaxy to give his buddies some Chicago hot dogs with the works." Then I'd change gears and tell the story as he wanted it.

The Old Witch stories did something else besides teach and pleasure Daniel. As I told the stories, I got a mental image of how the Old Witch and her friends looked . . . even the floor plan of the house they all lived in. It was only several years later I learned that Daniel also had his own mental images. Thus, the stories fired his imagination and creativity. Here's something else interesting about the stories....they usually contained more than one plot line. Thus, I might be telling a story about Mr. Googolplex one minute and then I'd shift to another about The Stranger and his beloved vacuum cleaner. Then in a few minutes, back to Mr. Googolplex. I kept his mind hopping all over the place.

P. Sounds utterly confusing.

M. There was also Tatiana the Terrific, Count Morbid, Mr. Googleplex, the five ghosts...Eeeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo and Bernie, and so many more. I also used the stories to teach Daniel morals and behavior. Let's say that I wanted him to wash his hands before coming to dinner. I'd simply make that part of an Old Witch story. It always amazed me how easy it was to teach him anything, as long as I made it part of an Old Witch story.

P. <-----impressed. It's pretty clear these stories were dear to your heart. Are you going to do anything with them?

M. Like sell 'em? That's a joke. No publisher in America wants to see a kid's story that uses words like lethargic, bellicose, piqued and tepid. Can you imagine what they'd think about a story about the Old Witch's failure to file income taxes -- not to mention that the name "Old Witch" is politically incorrect to start with?

P. The income tax story must have been a gas. What did you hope to teach Daniel with it?

M. That we all have certain civic responsibilities and paying taxes is one of them.

P. Why not play the publisher's game, delete the big words and adult themes so you can get the Old Witch published?

M. <----- will stick head in oven first. I won't write anything that dumbs down my stories. Julie thinks that we should self publish them and sell them on the Internet.

P. Will you?

M. No way.

P. Why not?

M. Because I cannot stand the world of business.

P. Will you send me one of your stories?

M. You got it. I think I will put a story in the appendix also (see appendix 2). Are you still playing music?

P. More than that. There is a local Suzuki violin school nearby. Bill's mother insists on paying for Erica's lessons.

M. :o) Good for her! How about your mother?

P. When she heard about the Suzuki lessons, she went nuts and bought Erica and Mickey the Book of Knowledge encyclopedia. Hahahahah. The old gals are competing. Is the stuff about the Old Witch finished?

M. Yes.

P. I keep thinking about that black grandmother whose two sons were never taught how to read yet were promoted from grade to grade...what can parents do about that?

M. Plenty. **THEIR FIRST JOB IS TO FIND OUT HOW WELL THEIR CHILDREN READ.** Kids who cannot read or read well are very often doomed to failure in school and in life. At all costs, this must not be allowed to happen. Moreover, educators who allow that to happen should be fired and sent to work in the Siberian salt mines where they cannot ruin any more lives.

P. Won't Mickey's report card tell me if he's a good reader?

M. Not always. Sorry to say, you cannot rely on grades. Instead, you rely on what you hear as Mickey reads to you out loud. Does he skip words or guess at them? Does he read with confidence or haltingly? From listening to him read, you will learn what you need to know. But if parents are still unsure, they should have their kids tested by one of the private learning centers...Huntington, Sylvan etc.

P. You're a bit of a nut on this subject, aren't you?

M. HAHAHHA. I've been called that before, but I don't care. Most problems in school stem from the failure of the teachers to properly teach reading. As I see things, there is no reason for any of that

failure...reading has to be one of the easiest subjects to teach...if you know how.

P. And of course, u know how...right?

M. Yes I do. Moreover, as a result of poor reading skills, kids start falling behind in their other subjects and that shatters their ego . . . their self-esteem. Pretty soon they begin to think of themselves as failures which leads to a whole new host of problems. **AT ALL COSTS, PARENTS MUST MAKE SURE THEIR KIDS READ VERY WELL!!!**

P. What if Mickey won't read for me? He can be obstinate.

M. That would be a bad sign and may mean that he knows he can't read well. If that's the case, call out the Marines because you have a serious problem that must be solved before he gets to fourth grade. Fourth grade is what separates the men from the boys. The material is much more difficult -- book reports are introduced -- heavier academics. Any child who isn't reading competently by the fourth grade is doomed to fail academically. Again, you might not see this on a report card. What you are more likely to see is something like this. "Tries hard but not living up to potential," or "Is

having some difficulty expressing ideas -- tutoring recommended."

P. If Mickey turns out to be a poor reader, then what?

M. Then **YOU** become his reading teacher. Get Blumenfeld's Alphaphonics, read the instructions, and do the job yourself.

P. But . . . the time . . . he goes to school all day.

M. **THEN PULL HIM OUT OF SCHOOL AND MAKE TIME!** Tutor him yourself at home until he becomes a superb reader.

P. I don't think his school would like that.

M. That's tough crap. If he can't read well, their opinions no longer count spit. Remember, they're the ones who failed to teach Mickey this all important skill. Your only concern is Mickey . . . not the school. Got that?

P. *He's almost over the edge.* Keep going.

M. Sorry, sometimes I get really bitter about this. Do you have any idea how many lives have been ruined because most teachers have no idea how to teach reading?

P. <-----Yawning ZZZZZZZ

M. <-----getting off soapbox. Next subject - standardized achievement tests. About three or four times during your children's time in grammar school students will take these state mandated tests to measure their academic achievement. It is vitally important that children score high on these tests. Kids who score well are considered smart and treated by faculty with much more respect than kids who score low. You want your children to be respected by their teachers and anyone else who is judging their abilities.

P. I've heard that students can't prepare for such tests.

M. You've heard wrong. The mere act of taking old tests prepares students and removes much of the fear and anxiety. With test taking skills under his belt, a mediocre student can easily score much higher on standardized tests than an unprepared straight A student.

P. Sounds unfair to me. :o(

M. Life is only fair if one looks at our Constitution. Otherwise, it's very unfair. Is this any different than the high school kids who take S.A.T. preparation classes? I even took a ten week course to prepare for the C.P.A. exam. I was an exceedingly lousy accountant yet I was able to pass the test. Frankly, I passed that dumb test because I was test smart. Would you believe that the CPA exam hardly measures accounting skills?

P. What does it measure?

M. Your ability to regurgitate esoteric balony on demand. I now wish I flunked it and went into plumbing.

P. Hahahhaha.

M. I have an idea about all this testing nonsense.

P. <-----Listening with rapt attention.

M. I think the schools should teach test preparation skills and make it a mandatory subject. That way all the students will have an equal opportunity to be prepared.

P. How do I prepare my kids for these tests wise one?

M. Two ways. First, get a copy of some old achievement tests from the school or the library and have your children take em over and over again. Familiarity breeds expertise. Mary Pride's *Big Book of Home Learning* lists several sources for these tests. Second, get from the library or a bookstore *Essential Test Taking Skills* by Gary Gruber. There are two books available, one for third to fifth graders and one for sixth to eighth graders. Gruber's books are good but there are several others available. Related to preparation for achievement tests is the whole subject of learning skills. Learning is a skill all by itself, just like swimming, reading or typing. Students can learn how to learn.

P. I never thought of it as a skill.

M. But it is. Learning can be greatly enhanced if one is taught the "tricks of the learning trade." Long ago, when I was teaching a tax class for the IRS, I remember trying to help one of the trainee Revenue Agents with some material he couldn't quite grasp.

P. You were with the IRS ? One of *THEM?*

M. *I'll never live it down...* Yes Patty, for six years I was one of the bad guys. Anyway, I asked the student how he studied the material and his answer amazed me. He said he read every chapter in the book three times and hoped some of it would stick! No wonder he was failing! That's the worst possible method and a waste of time.

P. What's so bad about reading the chapter three times? *I used to do that too!*

M. Just about everything. With that method, a student is taking the shotgun, disorganized approach to learning the material. A good student first reviews his class notes, briefly skims the chapter, and then sets out in a organized way to read and digest the material. There are tricks of the learning trade that students should be taught.

P. *No one taught me that stuff.* Do you think schools should teach these tricks of the trade along with test taking skills?

M. Absolutely. Do you think the Army should train its new recruits how to shoot a rifle?

P. *Stupid question.* Of course!

M. Then think of a classroom as a battlefield. Wouldn't it be a good idea to teach students how to fight -- how to learn....how to succeed?

P. Your analogies amaze me. Do the schools ignore this subject too?

M. Of course. I have yet to see a school that teaches learning skills.

P. Why do you think they ignore the subject?

M. For several reasons, the most important being that most educators haven't yet figured out how important it is. Secondly, teachers aren't taught how to teach learning skills while they're getting their degrees in education -- it's not part of the curriculum.

P. Just so I'm sure I understand what you are saying, can you summarize for me what you mean by learning skills?

M. Memory improvement - test taking skills - note taking - concentration - time management - attitude. That about covers it. Kids who master those skills -- and the sooner the better -- have a much better chance at

academic achievement than those who don't. It's that simple. While American schools do not teach learning skills, the Japanese do so routinely. In *The Learning Gap*, authors Harold Stevenson and James Stigler compare Japanese and American schools to discover why the Japanese are such high achievers. Their most significant findings relate to the teaching of learning skills. I quote, "From the very first months of school, there is explicit instruction in helping students acquire the kinds of study skills - e.g., note taking, outlining, memory skills, working in groups - that are often assumed but are never taught to American students."

P. Memory improvement is a learning skill?

M. It sure is and it's probably the most important one of all. In his book *Super Memory: Super Student*, Harry Lorayne sums it up better than I can. Here's a quote from his book:

*"I've said it so many times, it's been copied so many times, I may as well say it again: The "three R's" cliché - reading, 'riting, rithmetic - should be four R's. The first R should be should be remembering. Because without that R, you can't read, write,*

*do 'rithmetic! All education is based on remembering. I know of no high school or college subject that doesn't require lots of memory work. Please, please, Mr. and Ms. Teacher, tell me what "studying" means if it doesn't mean memorizing. Can't you see, Mr. and Ms. Educator, that knowing how to remember is (along with knowing how to read) the core, the heart and soul, of learning and education. Can't you see that it's the fundamental premise for all students, at any level, throughout their school careers?"*

P. It sounds as though Lorayne has had his share of battles with educators. Did you give Daniel memory instruction?

M. At the time, I didn't fully appreciate the importance of memory power, but I remember teaching him a little about mnemonics. Now I wish I'd spent weeks on the subject.

P. You think it's that important?

M. Yep. I now know that Lorayne is right. Memory is the basis for all learning in and out of school. Try to learn anything without memory -- it can't be done. I'm sure you remember taking tests, quizzes and exams in school, right?

P. Sure, a zillion of them. So?

M. What do you think those tests measured?

P. My knowledge?

M. *She's not even close.* Not exactly. They all tested your recall -- your memory.

P. *Hmmm...makes sense.* Is Lorayne's book in the appendix?

M. It sure is. So are other books on various study skills. All in all, these books will teach your children how to be superb students.

P. Any more tidbits for me to chew on?

M. I'm sure you've heard the old adage, "The wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the most oil?" Squeaking

means making yourself known to your children's teachers and principal. If they know you personally, they will be extra careful with your kids. This also means attending P.T.A. meetings and monthly Board of Education meetings.

P. I have no power over the educators.

M. You have more power than you think. Educators do not like to mess with parents because they never know which parent has the power and fortitude to cause them misery with the school board or the state legislators. They are much more careful with parents who, because of their known presence, might later cause a sticky situation to arise.

P. While I like this suggestion, I don't like the implication that I am engaged in some kind of battle with educators.

M. Patty, I've learned that parents are often engaged in warfare with the educators. Face it, there's a war out there.

P. But not all educators are bad guys.

M. Very true. Some are good guys and only have the best interests of their students in mind. But others . . . tell me, how can you tell the good guys from the bad guys?

P. I give up. How?

M. You can't. That's why you have to get involved in school affairs. Even the good guys will go the extra mile for you more readily if you know you really care. It's time to tell you about all my mistakes. Interested?

P. *This I've got to hear.* <----- waiting with bated breath ...

M. The worst one was that I never should have sent Daniel to school at all. Instead, I should have home-schooled him until high school, maybe college. The time he spent in school was an utter waste of his time and my money. I had an accomplished self-learner on my hands and didn't know it. I should have bought him an encyclopedia, given him tons of memory improvement instruction, and lots more. I could have done a much better job.

P. How about the socialization aspect -- mingling with his peers -- birthday parties -- that stuff?

M. That's important, I agree. However, I could have joined the home-schooling network which would have acquainted him with lots of kids his age. Home-schoolers are a tight knit bunch and work together to afford that socialization. Hold it...Julie wants to chat with you.

P. Ok, put the Scrabble champ on.

J. Hi Patty. As long as you are chatting about mistakes, I've a big one to share with you.

P. *It must be a biggiee.* What's it about?

J. Parenting. How I raised my kids. *This is going to hurt...but it's not too late for her. Here goes.* Patty, my kids do not know me and frankly, I do not know them. Except for the superficialities, we do not know each other and as adults, we have little in common.

P. *What is she talking about?* Please explain.

J. I'll try. It's just that I never really knew my kids. Sure, I was their mother but that fact alone never got me into their world. I guess what I am trying to say is that my kids are not my friends....they are just my children. That's a huge difference. I regret that it took me so many years to discover that. I never really talked to them as

one person to another...it was always as a mother. I remember lots of “do this or do that” but not, “what do you think about this?” I never really showed an interest in them as people, that was my mistake. I should have gone into their world and invited them into mine. After so many years of raising my three kids, I failed in making any of them a friend.

P. You are talking about quality time, right?

J. Yes. I was so wrapped up in my role as a mother that I never gave my kids that quality time. I hope you are getting this.

P. But Julie, I've heard people say that you cannot and should not be friends with your kids.

J. Trust this old grandma on this, they're all wrong.

M. I'm back.

P. Marsh, what other mistakes do you think you made?

M. I should have taught Daniel handwriting because the schools sure didn't. His handwriting is awful . . . writes like a dyslectic chicken. When I went to school in the early fifties, my teachers really stressed handwriting.

We practiced for hours Today they don't stress it. Get a book called *Learn Handwriting*, by Pen Notes, Inc. Teacher supply stores carry it. Next mistake, I didn't throw the TV into the garbage after Daniel turned 2.

P. LOL. You've mentioned that before.

M. Did you ever watch Saturday morning cartoons such as Tom and Jerry? Such cartoons teach kids that violence and revenge are acceptable behavior. No one can tell me that kids are not influenced by this wholesale display of video carnage. TV is one good reason why America is easily the most violent nation on earth. Americans take their kids to church on Sunday to unlearn what they've learned the previous six days. It's ludicrous.

P. Don't you and Julie watch TV?

M. Very rarely. Since we have met about 8 years ago, we have watched very little TV. That's one of the benefits of Julie being hearing impaired.

P. Please explain.

M. Well...because she grew up having this condition, she never got into watchin TV. Instead, she reads books

which do not require her to hear. This is another case where a disability has a silver lining.

P. I suppose you feel the same about Nintendo?

M. That product and all the other similar brain boilers should be banned as national mental health hazards. They're worse than dope.

P. Anything else?

M. I regret that I didn't give Daniel Tae Kwon Do lessons.

P. Teaching him how to fight flies in the face of your non-violent stance. Aren't you being a bit hypocritical?

M. Not at all. Such self defense instruction teaches students not to fight unless absolutely necessary. But, more importantly, it involves a discipline that teaches bodily control and provides physical exercise. For Erica, you might consider an organization called Gymboree for physical activity.

P. Is that it?

M. You already know my opinions about the importance of music. I often wish I would have given

Daniel violin or piano lessons starting when he was about two. And prior to the lessons, I should have done what I advised you to do: bathe the house in hours and hours of classical music from the day Daniel was born. For violin lessons at a very tender age, try the Suzuki people.

P. Any more pearls of wisdom?

M. Yes, an important one. Keyboarding skills. Right now this skill is important. In ten years it will be mandatory -- a 21st century survival skill.

P. I learned typing in high school, and not very well.

M. <----- a fast hunt and pecker. It's one of my life's major regrets that I never learned to touch type.

P. At what age should I do this with my kids?

M. I'd teach Mickey now, but Erica - I am not sure her motor skills can handle it. By the way, have u spoken to Ellen lately? I need a good laugh.

P. Everyday since our evening lessons started. Sometimes twice a day. She's convinced you are a closet home school freak which, to her, makes you lower

than a communist spy. Just the words home school sends her into orbit. That must be a very sensitive issue with educators.

M. You can bet ur pink bloomers on that. The fuzzies consider homeschooling a major threat, maybe even more than vouchers. I love it when I hear about all the home schoolers doing great on the SATs.

P. You're really are a home schooling booster.

M. They certainly do have my support.

P. What's next?

M. You already know how I feel about foreign language instruction. That's it. Want to call it a night?

P. Wait. I've a question. You haven't yet mentioned what happens when it's time to send Erica to school. What then?

M. <----- avoiding this subject like the black plague.

P. Wimping out on me, eh? What's the problem?

M. Since we started our nightly chats, I knew you would eventually ask me about choosing a suitable school for her.

P. I'm a big girl. Tell me, what's the big problem?

M. Can we continue this tomorrow?

P. Sure Marsh...g'nite

M. G'night to you too.

#### **NEXT EVENING**

P. Hi, Marsh! Are you fortified for tonight's discussion?

M. Well, I gardened a lot today. Planted a bunch of marigolds. I even had an Italian beef sandwich for dinner. Yep, I'm ready. :o)

P. Have the Tums nearby? Marsh, it's time to bite the bullet and tell me . . . tell the world how to choose a good school. C'mon, be a hero. :o) Oh...Ellen popped in this morn.

M. What was on her agenda?

P. Her tirade today was on home schooling again, her favorite target. She really blasted it ... said again that home schoolers are all a bunch of subversives out to destroy the public school system. She asked me point blank if I intended to home school Erica.

M. What did you tell her?

P. I told her the truth . . . that I am keeping all my options open. I also told her that Mickey is scheduled for a thorough reading evaluation on Saturday with a private tutor.

M. Did you listen to Mickey read as I suggested?

P. Yes, and that's the reason for the evaluation. Neither Bill nor I were happy with what we heard. He skipped words, didn't stop for periods, mispronounced words...guessed at some. It was not a joy to behold. Ellen was not thrilled with the news of a private evaluation. She demanded to know where I got the audacity to question Mickey's teachers and have an outside evaluation. Most unfortunately for Ellen, our dear mother was in the next room and heard it all.

M. *I gotta hear this.* <----- sitting on edge of chair.

P. Mother gave Ellen a tongue lashing she won't soon forget. Told her I had every right as a mother to question anyone or anything that posed a threat to my children, HER grandchildren. And then Mother told Ellen to get off my case about you, home schoolers, phonics, and everything else. Whew!

M. So what did Ellen say?

P. In our family one does not talk back to Mother if one wants to live happily ever after.

M. Hahahahahaha.

P. Ellen wasn't laughing. Now where were we?

M. Choosing a suitable school for Erica when the time comes. As I suggested already, this is a major problem.

P. Well...tell me.

M. If u teach Erica as I taught Daniel, she will be light years ahead of other kids her age. That makes for problems. The school work will be way too infantile for

her intellect. She might get very bored...restless...that kind of thing.

P. How did Daniel adjust?

M. He took his own reading material to school...his computer magazines etc. That seemed to work for him.

P. Was he in a gifted class?

M. Yes, but that made little difference because Daniel was light years ahead of them too. Gifted classes in the schools are a joke when u r talking about these kids.

P. You are making them sound like freaks. :(((( ( *Do I want this for Erica?*

M. That was not my intent. But Wonderkidz are different. For one, they can be very intellectually challenging. You have to be prepared to have a child who can be classified as a genius...or even way above that.

P. You have mentioned a 200+ IQ. Have u ever seen that happen because of your program of very early academics?

M. No...but I think it's highly probable. I doubt that any child under 2 has ever gotten the amount of stimulation that I recommend in the Wonderkidz program. Erica would be a trailblazer.

P. Hmmmmmmmmm. *Do I want that for Erica?????*

M. *Now for the big question.* Patty, are you prepared to home school Erica?

P. WHOAAAAAAAAA!! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE.

M. Okay...I'll back off.

P. No wait...is that my only option?

M. I have told u that no school could ever deal with a Wonderkid, at least not as I envision them.

P. Why?

M. I already told you that Wonderkidz are special and have intellectual needs that are light years ahead of anything a normal school could offer. Think of it this way, would you enjoy going back to the eighth grade?

P. That would be a bit infantile for me.

M. Okay, now picture Erica in kindergarten being fed a diet of blocks while her mind is on computer programming. Wouldn't she feel as you do? Remember what Ibuka said about these kids?

P. Please refresh my memory

M. That such children should be encouraged to become independent self-learners who have no need for formal schooling. Give 'em a computer, tons of books, lots of encouragement, and they will educate themselves.

P. C'mon Marsh, I know there are schools for the gifted all over.

M. Whose definition of gifted? Patty, our educational system has been so dumbed down for so long that today's gifted student would be just average by past predumbed down standards. Furthermore, the gifted teacher of today would not have a clue how to deal with a Wonderkid.

P. But let's say Erica is not a Wonderkid and I wanted to find a good school... how would I go about it?

M. Finding a real good school takes some detective work. First, and most important, find out how the school teaches reading. That's the acid test. Any school that boasts of Whole Language is to be avoided like my ex mother-in-law.

P. LOL. What if they say they teach phonics?

M. Parents have become more aware of the phonics issue. Thus, some Whole Language schools are on the alert and tell parents that they do teach phonics. However such schools often keep their Whole Language methodology, but throw in a smattering of phonics. I call that phony phonics. You must find out if the school really teaches phonics as it should be taught.

P. How can I do that?

M. Simple. Ask the principal if they teach "intensive systematic phonics" by itself or in conjunction with Whole Language. If you hear the words "Whole Language" head for the door, walk out, and never return. Furthermore, if the school says they do teach intensive systematic phonics, you need proof. The issue of reading instruction is far too crucial to a children's education to take anyone's word for anything.

P. You are none too trusting. What's the proof?

M. See what books they use for reading instruction in the first grade. If they say the word whole language anywhere in them, take a fast flyer. Cutesy pictures also gives them away. Next, don't be the slightest bit impressed with the newness or beauty of the school or the grounds. That may only mean that it's a rich school, which, in terms of academics, often means zilch. I have yet to see a building, no matter how new, teach a kid how to read. Only a good teacher can do that.

P. Money must help.

M. Not much. Just go ask the people in Kansas City about that. In response to dismal test scores, a judge ordered the city to spend millions of dollars for improvements.

P. What happened?

M. Kansas City ended up with lots of new schools, fancy computer labs and much more, with no significant improvement in test scores. That proves once again that facilities and buildings -- no matter how nice they are -- do not teach one thing. Good teachers teach.

Kansas City taxpayers would have saved several hundred million dollars had they first insisted that the schools change their teaching methodologies and properly teach the basic skills -- that all important foundation I talked about earlier.

P. Let's talk about private versus public schools.

M. Don't expect me to say that private schools are better, because some are and some are not. It really all boils down to what teachers are in the school. The teachers in all schools, public and private, all went to the same teacher's colleges, which means they all have had an equal opportunity to learn how not to teach. Daniel went to three grammar schools and all were poor, with the most expensive private one by far and away the worst.

P. So much for the privates always being better than the publics. Any more tips?

M. You might also ask the principal for their statewide ranking on recent aptitude or achievement tests.

P. They give that info out?

M. A school that ranks high will be happy to show you its ranking. Others will hesitate or refuse to give out their scores. Next a pet peeve. It really does not fit in here but Julie will forgive me.

P. Than get to it!

M. It's about the "at risk" label that the often put on poorer kids, mostly Afro-Americans. The label says, "these kids are so poor and disadvantaged that they will fail in school." It also says, "when these kids fail in school, it's not our fault . . . we told you it would happen." That's how educators take themselves off the hook when they fail to educate the kids. It's all part of the "blame the kids, not us" syndrome. It amazes me that the Afro-American community tolerates that demeaning term. I believe that if these kids are at risk for anything, it's for being mistaught. I figure that kids spend about 7,000 hours in grammar school...in that amount of much time, I could teach a smart cockroach how to read.

p. ROFLOL!!!! Any more ideas on how to find a good school?

M. I could say that you should ask around for recommendations from your friends, neighbors, and

relatives. But I won't because so few people know what a really good school is or should be. They are in no position to make recommendations.

P. Geez Marsh... do u think that you are u the only human on earth that knows what a good school should be?

M. Sometimes I think so.

P. You can be insufferable...know that?

M. Julie tells me that every hour of every day. Julie just nudged me...looks like the lady wants some Scrabble revenge.

P. You whipped her yesterday?

M. And the day before too. Let's call it a night, ok?

P. G'night Marsh.

#### **NEXT EVENING**

P. Hi Marsh...did ya whip her again? :o)

M. I was slaughtered...513 to 267. That was an inglorious end to my two game winning streak.

P. Remind me never to play Scrabble with Julie. Here's some Gotcha! news. After dinner, I decided to watch Bill play Gotcha with Mickey. They were so engrossed that they didn't even notice me. I saw Mickey put a 2 from his hand on top of Bill's 4 and then say, "building 7s." Bill almost fell over and Mickey started to giggle. What was that all about?

M. The two is a power card. Putting it on top of the 4 changed the build into a 16. 4 squared is 16 and the sum of those digits is 7.

P. Wow! Got any thoughts on preschools?

M. Depends on your goal. If it is to provide other kids for Erica to play with, any of them will do. If you have education in mind, forget them all. You can teach Erica more in a week than any of them could teach in a year. I called a preschool last week that advertised it stressed a "rigorous" preschool learning program.

P. I suppose that means they teach academics.

M. You suppose wrong. The lady said, "We introduce kids to prereading at four years old." I asked, what does "prereading" mean? "We teach them the

alphabet." Then I asked her about phonics and her response was, "Oh, we leave all that stuff to the grammar schools."

P. You don't think I should enroll Erica in a preschool?

M. Let me tell you about Julie's sister on this matter. Many years ago when both sisters had preschoolers, Julie asked Janet what preschool she was going to send her kids to. Janet replied that she would never send her children away from home because she had too much to teach them herself. Does that tell you what I think?

P. Yes, sure does.

M. Don't ever forget that parents are the first and best teachers. Remember Harry Truman's buck?

P. Marsh, you have avoided the subject of home schooling. Why?

M. You told me the first day that you were uncomfortable with the whole idea. So I decided to tell you about home schooling slowly and not pressure you into it. I sort of led you to water and hoped that you would drink.

P. *He wants me to home school!!* You really think I should home school my kids?

M. Home schooling is not possible nor desirable for everyone, but for you it is. Yes, I think you should.

P. Marsh, from the beginning I've suspected that you were a closet home schooler.

M. Wrong. I was never in the closet. I told you up front that I was sorry that I did not home school my own kids. And besides, why would I have to hide my opinions on the subject from you? I consider home schooling a great adventure, and a wonderful way to spend time with your children....not to mention how much more they will learn. Right now I envy the fact that you have the opportunity to do what I did not.

P. I don't even know how to start a home school!

M. Then learn how. Aren't you smart enough?

P. *He is goading Me...*You think it is so easy...

M. It's easier than you think. There is no end of help available to you...other home schoolers, associations, books, magazines, the list of resources is endless.

P. Yes, I noticed all that when I thumbed through Mary Pride's book. Is there any info on the net on home schooling?

M. Tons. Just go to almost any search engine and type in the words HOME SCHOOL. Patty, the home schooling movement in America is not growing so quickly just because parents are frantic about our dismal educational system. It's much more than that. I think that the word is spreading about the closeness and love that is generated between parents and their children by home schooling and all the other wonderful advantages.

P. *I am going to bite again.* Okay Marsh, let's have 'em.

M. I am not here to talk you into home schooling. *I hope my nose isn't growing.*

P. *I'll bet his nose is growing.* Marsh!...let's have em!

M. Well, there are about 654.32 great reasons to home school, but I will limit them to those I consider most important.

P. I love the one you already mentioned...the closeness.

M. Yes, that was very special with Daniel and me. Then there is the fact that home schoolers are in control of their children's education. They do not have to worry about the psychobabblists and their new age baloney. Plus, they can pick and choose their teaching methodologies, phonics being a good example. Here's Julie, she has something to tell you.

J. Hi Patty... I would like to repeat something that I read in one of Doman's books. "Learning is not the vegetable...it's the dessert." Kids learn in school (mostly from other kids) that school is a form of prison, a punishing experience. Home schooled children aren't exposed to that.

P. Be fair Julie, not all school atmospheres are like that.

J. True...but go find a school that has a good learning atmosphere with absolute certainty. It cannot

be done. It's a crapshoot and those odds aren't good enough for your children.

P. *This lady would love my mother!* Thanks Julie. By the way, did you ever home school?

J. I am not done. Marsh is too diplomatic to tell you what to do about home schooling. Having spent years fighting with the schools, I am not so kind. If there is any way in the world you can arrange it, home school your kids. Do not let those (expletives deleted) get their hands on your kids!!!!!! Now, please send me your mother's phone number. We grandmas must stick together. And no, I never home schooled my kids, but like Marsh, I sure wish I had. I would have avoided years of aggravation.

P. *WHEW!!!* Marsh, you mentioned fun as another reason.

M. How could I forget all the laughs that Daniel and I shared? You betcha...teaching is tons of fun. Even more than that, I felt a sense of accomplishment...that I did something very worthwhile and special.

P. <-----has even more to think about. Is tonight's lesson over?

M. Yep, we're done for tonight.

P. You don't want to talk some more?

M. No Patty, let's call it a night. We can talk tomorrow night. G'nite Patty.

P. G'night Marsh.

## CHAPTER 9

### AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Doom and gloom time. This chapter is about America's dismal educational system. Folks, don't stop reading now! This is stuff you must know.

P. Hey Marsh!

M. <----- looking somber. :o(

P. I know today's chapter is about our educational system. If it makes you that unhappy, let's skip it.

M. Can't. You need to know the gory details. Forewarned is forearmed and all that rot. It's not a very pleasant story.

P. <----- doesn't like talking to grumps. :o((((((((

M. Sorry. Fasten your seat belt for the next hour or so. We're about to enter the world of miseducation of America.

P. I will endure. The sun will rise tomorrow. Maybe you could use a drink?

M. Last night, as I was collecting my thoughts on this subject, I had a Bloody Mary. The heartburn lasted three hours and five bicarbonates. I wasn't born to drink anything but milk.

P. LOL! Okay, get to the heart of the matter. What has caused the mess we are in?

M. Lots of things...not one single cause.

P. Ok...but what's the biggest of the bunch?

M. Probably the use of poor teaching methodologies in the schools gets the nod.

P. You are suggesting that the schools don't know how to teach? Ellen would love that one. Remember, she teaches the teachers.

M. I'm not suggesting. I'm saying it loud and clear, and I am not blaming the teachers. Someone else deserves that dubious honor.

P. Here we go again with the fuzzy headed college professors.

M. Yeah, they are the culprits. The teachers who teach the teachers. It is because of them that America has by far (and test scores prove this) the worst education system of all the industrial nations. We're not even an also ran . . . we're dead last. It is no wonder that the French, Japanese, Koreans and others are making monkeys out of us. They laugh at our dumbed down infantile schools.

P. Why must u call always use the term fuzzy heads?

M. Sorry, it's cause they think fuzzily. Would u prefer dopey thinkers?

P. Marsh! They cannot be that bad. :(

M. Tell that to all those whose lives they ruined.

P. MARSHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!

M. I think we need a break to cool off.

P. Fine...see u in an hour.

**LATER**

P. Are u in a better mood?

M. I am sorry..but u know.this subject makes me crazy.

P. You are forgiven...please continue the dismal saga.

M. Many of today's education ills can be traced to a man named John Dewey. His philosophy of education was that the development of social skills took priority over the 3 Rs. Some call Dewey's philosophy "progressive education." This was the introduction of psychobabble to education.

P. When did all this happen?

M. The 30s. Along with this new philosophy, phonics as a reading instruction method was dumped in favor of a new method called Look-Say. With the new emphasis on social engineering, the psychologists and sociologists managed to worm their way into the educational arena. With them came endless research studies, statistics, and the psycho-babble. Kids were no longer pupils. They became objects of study.

The de-emphasis on phonics and other basic skills instruction began to take its toll in the 1940s and 1950s. Standardized test scores started to take an

alarming dive. With parents howling and the media ever ready to report the dismal news, the educators had to find a quick fix to defuse the situation. Rather than admit that the new methodologies were failing miserably, they had a better idea: *the tests were made easier!* Enter the "**DUMBING DOWN OF AMERICA.**" As a result of constantly lowered standards, we lost sight of what is really superior academic performance. Heck, the gifted student of today is probably an average student compared to pre dumbed-down students.

P. You know how to depress a gal. :o(

M. I have not begun to depress. With look-say and the diving test scores came a whole new element in American education -- the **REMEDIAL** industry.

P. Why didn't the educators just admit that the Look-Say system was a failure and dump it?

M. Dump the golden goose? Patty, there is big money in failure. Thousands of educators, psychologists and organizations feed off of it. There is no money in success. Reputations played a hand in this too. What college professor wants to admit that everything he's taught is wrong? Honor is at stake.

P. Tell me about phonics.

M. Sure. With phonics as a first step in reading instruction, kids are taught that the letters have sounds which blend together to create words. The Phoenicians who invented this method created a way for speech to be recorded on paper. This was a gigantic intellectual leap forward for mankind. Prior to the alphabet, mankind communicated via Egyptian hieroglyphics which are just pictures. The alphabet was a key element in our intellectual evolution.

P. So what's Look Say?

M. Look-Say, as a method for teaching reading, was originally intended as a way to teach the deaf how to read since they could not hear the sounds of the letters. It was a great idea for the deaf, but for the vast majority of kids who could hear, Look-Say proved to be a dismal failure.

With Look-Say, kids are taught how to read by memorizing whole words by their configuration. This is accomplished by making children read the same words over and over again in incredibly boring Dick and Jane readers (basal) until the words were memorized. With

this method, first graders maybe learned three to four hundred words a year.

P. That's a rather limited vocabulary.

M. The basal readers used something called "readability formulas" that severely limited the selection of words.

P. How many words did you teach Daniel the first year?

M. Since Daniel knew phonics, he was able to read several thousand words without resorting to memorizing them. Phonics is the code that unlocks words. A seven year old with Look-Say instruction might learn four to five hundred. That's infantile, that's dumbing down. Our kids can do far better than that. Around the mid 1980s another warmed over version of Look Say was invented: Whole Language.

P. That's how they taught Mickey to read. *I can't stand this.*

M. Called a "psycholinguistic guessing game" by its creators, this fad is a real gem. With it, kids are encouraged to guess at words with picture clues. Think of a picture of a fish after the written word fish. That's

the context clue which teaches kids that the word is fish. With this method, kids are memorizing the whole word fish. The fuzzyheads who invented this abortion proudly say, "we are teaching meaning!" What they are really doing is taking a giant step backward and going back to hieroglyphics. With Whole Language, a child is taught the word horse by showing a picture of a horse next to the word. With me so far?

P. Yes, go on. *I can't stand much more....*

M. Now, what do you think the fuzzies would say if the child reads the word as "pony" instead of horse because a pony looks like a horse? According to Professor Kenneth Goodman of Arizona State, the prime sponsor of this idiotic methodology, that would be all right because the child is getting the general meaning of the word! After all, a horse is a pony and a pony is a horse. Right?

P. You know how to upset a lady. *Mickey was taught to read like this?*

M. Guess how Goodman and company foisted this nonsense on our American schools?

P. I give up, how? *Who cares?*

M. First, they told everyone, "Whole Language teaches meaning." Since everyone agrees that it is generally a good idea for kids to understand what they read, Whole Language looked real good. Then said to one and all "We use good literature to teach reading." The teachers and most everyone else fell for it.

P. Good literature, huh?

M. Yep, as if good literature, which replaced the Dick and Jane basal readers, could teach anyone how to lift a word off the page. The lemmings in our schools heard the words, "good literature" and hailed Whole Language as the coming of the next Messiah.

P. But does it teach kids how to read? Please say yes.

M. Sure, some kids learn how to read with it just like many learned with Look-Say. Other millions, however, never learned to read well, or at all. And many more millions learned to hate reading. Here comes a little story. Several years ago I asked the CEO of the International Reading Association (IRA) about the empirical scientific evidence of studies he had in support of Whole Language. He admitted that he didn't have

any. This is in stark contrast to the almost 70 scientific studies that support phonics! That means that without a shred of scientific proof, the IRA, Goodman, all their cohorts, have foisted this absurd methodology on thousands of our schools, both public and private. Not one shred of proof! I would like a dollar for all the lives the IRA has ruined.

P. Did the fuzzies ever apologize for the years of Look-Say which they now deride?

M. Please! Are u kiddin? Let me tell you about a congressionally sponsored reading study. It seems that Congress was a bit curious about the best way to teach reading so they ordered the National Institute of Health to conduct a study. It took the about two years to complete it. You can see the report at:  
[www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Documents/pr\\_finalreport.htm](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Documents/pr_finalreport.htm)

P. Must I guess at their final conclusion?

M. You know that phonics won, hands down.

P. Won't the schools get the message and adopt phonics?

M. It'll happen right after the pope has his Bar-Mitzvah. For most educators, phonics is poison, no matter how many parents demand it or how many studies prove that it is by far the best way to teach reading. To dump Whole Language or Look-Say in favor of phonics, the fuzzies would, in effect, be admitting that they have been wrong for sixty years. They aren't big in the admission of guilt department. Their reputations are at stake, not to mention money.

P. Money?

M. At stake in this never-ending war between phonics and the bad guys are literally billions of dollars. If phonics wins this war (as it eventually will), here are the big losers:

1. The book publishing industry which publishes Whole Language text books for schools.
2. The college professors who "consult" with the publishers and earn fat fees and whose reputations are at stake.
3. The remedial reading and tutoring industry.
4. The special education industry

The trouble with phonics is that there is not much money involved. I didn't even spend \$20 to teach Daniel phonics.

P. Marsh...u are saying that our kids have been sold down the river for the almighty dollar. That's sad.

M. Now u know the source of my anger and cynicism.

P. Yes... I do now. :o(((((((

M. What is particularly maddening is that reading is so very easy to teach. Ya just teach the kids the alphabet and the sounds and give them no end of practice, practice and more practice. I'd give kids 4 hours of reading instruction and practice a day. That would end our illiteracy problem.

P. That's a lot of emphasis on reading.

M. Sure is...but considering its importance, let's make that five hours as day.

P. Okay okay...I get the idea!

M. Well, we've covered phonics so now it's time for early learning -- my favorite educational topic. First I have to tell you about the developmentalists. These are educators who believe that preschool children learn best through play and wouldn't think about teaching them to read. The originator of developmentalism was another fuzzy head named Piaget. His idea is that kids are ready to do certain things at certain ages. As an example, kids are developmentally ready to start walking and talking at about a year old. That we agree on. But he or his followers also believe that kids are not ready for reading or other academics until they reach six. That's where we part company. Instead, despite all the evidence, they continue to believe that 'lil kids should be fed sophomoric playtime drivel, far beneath their intellectual capabilities. In a nutshell, the developmentalists seriously underestimate how much they can learn and when.

Most parents like the idea of a preschool academic program. So, to mollify em, the fuzzies came up with the concept of "reading readiness." The developmentalists apparently equate learning with pain, the kind they no doubt experienced in elementary school themselves. Partly out of a sense of mercy, I suppose, they want to save kids by postponing academic instruction as long as possible but there is also another far more insidious reason.

P. Which is . . . ?

M. What 'lil kidz can learn is a huge threat to them. Remember Masaru Ibuka from the Sony Corporation? It is his opinion that children are the only ones who can change the educational system.

P. The children will change the system? *This I have to hear...*

M. Sure. Picture this: Twenty-five Wonderkidz enter the same kindergarten class. They carry to class their favorite reading material -- a newspaper, a fifth grade level novel, a computer manual. Now picture the poor confused teacher who wants to teach them the alphabet with blocks. Fat chance. All her timetables about what kids should learn and when are now down the drain. What is she supposed to do now? She sure can't give these kids wooden blocks with letters and numbers on them. The kids would laugh at her. She'd probably relate the problem to her principal who would take it to the school board. After about 1,200 frantic phone calls and committee meetings, they'd end up deciding to readjust their timetables to the kids' level. They'd have no other option. That's what Ibuka means when he says that the kids will eventually change the system. Instead of years

of gradual dumbing down the curricula, the educators would have to instantly smarten it up. I love it. :o)

P. <----- getting goose bumps thinking about my little Erica changing our educational system. Continue -- I thought this was going to be boring, but I'm enjoying it.

M. Wanna hear what I'd like to do???

P. <-----all ears and make it exciting!!

M. Here goes. I 'd like for someone---a corporation or a school district --- to give me 15 two and three year old kids, a classroom, an aide, and complete control to run it as I saw fit. In a few years they'd get back 15 very smart Wonderkidz who could read at the fourth grade level or higher. I'd show 'em it is easily possible.

P. How cud u teach them? Aren't u in a wheel chair?

M. I'd find a way. Next, the schools do not teach learning skills that I talked about in the last chapter.

P. Tell me, Marsh, if the educational system is so bad, why don't the politicians demand reform?

M. They have -- a zillion times already. Along with parents, they demand reforms all the time. But the trouble is... they don't know what reforms to demand. It took me years of study before I had enough knowledge to write this chapter. Politicians are busy people with no end of other pressing problems. How are they supposed to know about phonics, the developmentalists, and all the other threads of miseducation? Ain't gonna happen.

P. What about the school boards? Aren't they supposed to guide the educators or at least watch them?

M. Yes....but they do a lousy job of it. Like the politicians, they are ignorant of what they need to know. For example, if they knew anything at all, so many schools would not be using Whole Language to teach reading. The fuzzies have had a lot of practice in manipulating and fooling school boards and the politicians.

P. That's a rather harsh indictment.

M. Sorry...but lay people have no business in the educational arena. Education is simply too important to let amateurs guard the chicken coop. Next topic. Learning disabilities and special ed. This is really bad

stuff to watch out for. It all comes from the child psychologists, counselors and sociologists -- the psychobabblists. After they wormed their way into the educational arena, they became very busy inventing all sorts of conditions, diseases, and afflictions that our kids supposedly have. Kids who they diagnose as having one of the afflictions are placed in what is benignly called a "special education" class.

All of this special ed garbage got started in the '60s when the Federal government began to fund these classes. With that infusion of money, teachers began to specialize in "Special Education."

P. Let's be fair. There are some kids who are really learning disabled, right?

M. Sure are. But not tens of thousands of them!

P. Federal money did all this?

M. Yes. It all started with Johnson and his Great Society back in the 60s. What began as a well meaning program that would ensure that disadvantaged kids would learn in school turned into an educational black hole that costs taxpayers billions. But it's much more than the wasted money. It's what they're doing to our

kids with their labels and low expectations. That's the real crime.

P. How can we get the psychobabble artists out of education? Hang em?

M. That would be a good start. Hahaha.

P. Ellen called me last night and asked about the lessons. Says she is going to report you to the IRS.

M. Darn. She missed the FBI, CIA, FDA, SEC, and FTC. What was her complaint now?

P. Usual stuff. It drives her nuts that you have no professional qualifications. Called you a charlatan and an imposter, among other choice terms.

M. My qualifications are that I have no professional qualifications. Do you think I could tell you all this if I had a degree in education and was a member of the fuzzy club?

Another problem in American education is that there is no leadership, no national standards or uniformity. We have about 17,000 school districts in the U.S., each one has a school board and does pretty

much what it wants to do. If our army was run like this, every state would have different rifles and bullets. It would be utter chaos.

P. I see your point.

M. Let's now talk about teacher accountability. What should we do about teachers who can't teach or should not, because of their ill temperament, be in a classroom? Before answering that question, consider how important teachers...good teachers...are to our children's lives and to our nation. In my opinion, the biggest threat to our security is not rogue nations like Iraq possessing nuclear weapons. Instead, it's an ill educated workforce unable to compete in the 21st century. That's a far worse threat because so few people even recognize it as a threat.

P. I wud assume that we shud get rid of em.

M. That's fine and dandy except that the teachers unions make it exceedingly difficult.

P. Then dump the unions.

M. It might be easier to dump Jesus Christ and Jesus.

P. Hahahaha. What's next?

M. Let's talk about fads, fancies, and quick fixes in education. Think about what happens if you build a house on a three foot thick layer of quicksand. It becomes a never ending source of trouble unless you remove it and put a solid foundation. To get to the point, it seems that every week I read about a new fuzzy headed idea...a new quick fix to cure the problems caused by the underlying poor foundation.

P. What quick fixes?

M. Bussing, charter schools, vouchers, whole language, new math, special ed, ritalin, invented spelling, bilingual ed. The fuzzies constantly invent new things that do not work to cure problems that they created in the first place. It's utterly bizarre. Would u like to hear about the madness in Montana?

P. I have been waiting my whole life to hear about that.

M. It all started when I read an article one of my AOL friends sent me. A Montana newspaper had "good" news to report. It seems that the local high school students were being invited to go into the grammar

schools to help 5th graders learn to read. I wrote a letter to the editor that put the good news in a different light. My rebuttal was published. A week later the superintendent of that school district called to bitch at me for raining on his parade.

P. Really? What did you tell him?

M. That he should be ashamed of himself for even admitting that his 5th graders needed reading instruction. I also told him that other countries give their students one year (first grade) to master reading. He then hung up on me. I told you that American educators have no idea what the word excellence means.

P. Are you always this cynical? *I am sure he is.*

M. I have more faith in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Chicago Cubs than our educational system. We are lucky that the fuzzies did not lead our military during World War II or we would have made a wrong turn and invaded Milwaukee instead of Germany.

P. LOL!!! Oh Marsh...I have to tell that one to Ellen.

M. There's also the teaching of values. I recently read an article by a teacher lamenting the lack of morals and values in American children. She was most upset.

P. I think she has a valid concern.

M. I don't doubt that. With a steady diet of violent TV and Nintendo like brain boilers, it is hardly a surprise that some of our children are monsters. But who gave the schools the job of teaching morals and values?

P. They're filling a need.

M. Wouldn't their time be better spent teaching children the 3 Rs? Isn't that the job they're paid to do?

P. *Uh oh...the soap box...*One last thought. What do you think of bilingual education?

M. About as much as I think of my ex mother in law.  
:o(

P. Hahaha. What's wrong with it?

M. Only that it robs kids of a lifetime of opportunity. Correctly spoken and written English is a must if one wants a decent sized piece of the great American pie.

Do you think that General Motors would have a board member who talks like an ignoramus? It won't happen. Bilingual education, I submit, is a fraud on those it purports to benefit. Total immersion in English is the only way.

P. Marsh, what u would do to cure the ills in our educational system?

M. Dump it completely and start over.

P. That'll never happen.

M. You're right, but u asked for my opinion.

P. Why be so drastic...isn't there a less destructive way?

M. No. We have to dump the system and start over. This will only happen when our economic survival is at stake and the powers that be come to realize that the fuzzy heads cannot cut the mustard. The new millennium that just started will be very intellectually demanding and our survival will soon depend on a very educated and skilled population. When the schools do not deliver the goods, the business sector... people like Bill Gates... will begin to scream bloody murder and demand meaningful, immediate, and pervasive reform.

That is all the more true when you consider how many billions the business sector now spends on basic skills instruction.

P. Why specifically people like Gates?

M. Because Microsoft and all the other high tech companies must have a steady and reliable supply of very smart employees in order to compete and thrive.

P. This lady is gettin a bit weary...cud u speed things a bit? Get to the bloody revolution part. What's the first step?

M. We must nationalize the entire system. Have the feds run it with an iron hand as they do the army. Under this centralized system, all the kids in America would have the same text books, learn the same material, take the same tests, and be taught with the same proven methodologies, and be judged under the same standards. Teachers pay would be uniform and so would the material the teachers learn in the colleges.

Moreover, the feds would have the power to dismiss ineffective teachers and administrators. A stringent code of student behavior would be strictly

enforced. Parents would be held accountable for their children's behavior.

Finally, I have one comment to make about reading instruction. Keeping in mind the vast importance of reading, I would not promote a child to the second grade unless that child exhibits very strong reading skills. A b+ is not good enough. What do u think of my plan?

P. Rather draconian.

M. You asked me.

P. This was the last lesson....right?

M. Yes.

P. Any final words of wisdom for Bill and me?

M. Just let me repeat ...always keep in mind that the education of your children is far too important to entirely leave to the educators. You must get involved in this process because in the end, the buck stops with you. Now it's time for you and Bill to do your parental teaching job.

P. Are you sad our chats are over?

M. Yes Patty, very much so.

P. <----- was in a funk all day about it. :o(

M. I'll miss you.

P. It's strange. I've never heard your voice or seen your face. I just read your words, but I feel as if I've known you for twenty years. I'll miss you too, Mr. Underground Educator. I'll miss your opinions, your quirky stories, and...

M. Let's have no long tearful goodbyes...please.

P. Just one question...with your MS and all...what do you plan for the future?

M. Write the Wonderkidz book and then do my absolute best--MS or no MS -- to spread the word about all that we have chatted about. I will never give up...not ever. G'nite Patty...be well and let me know what is happening. Okay dear?

P. *He used the word dear.* Can I have a hug goodbye?

M. ((Patty))

P. ((Marsh))

## APPENDIX I

Recommended books and products:

### Phonics

"*Alphaphonics*," by Sam Blumenfeld. Order by calling the Paradigm Company at 208-322-4440. For children five and over, this is the best phonics instruction book available. About \$32 and worth every cent.

"*A Phonics Dictionary*," by Linda Hayward. Platt and Munk. A beautifully illustrated phonics picture show for kids four and under. For my money, this is the best book to teach phonics to our younguns.

"*Why Johnny Still Can't Read*," Rudolf Flesch. Harper. The title of this book tells it all.

### Math

Any math text written by John Saxon is great. Call Saxon Publishing at 800-284-7019.

"*How to Teach Your Baby Math*," Glenn Doman. Order from the Better Baby Store, 215-233-2050.

A Kumon math center will do wonders for your kids. Every major city has a center which is listed in the phone book.

Gotcha! This is the author's marvelous math card game. Direction booklet available from author.

### **Early Learning**

*"How To Multiply Your Baby's Intelligence,"* Glenn Doman. ISBN 0-385-18880-3. Phone 215-233-2050. This number will also get you to the Better Baby store. Ask them for a catalog.

*"Kindergarten Is Too Late,"* Masaru Ibuka. Simon and Shuster.

*"How To Raise a Brighter Child,"* Joan Beck ISBN 0-671-63203-5.

### **Student Study Skills**

*"Essential Test Taking Skills,"* Gary Gruber. ISBN 068-806-3500.

*"Super Memory - Super Student,"* Harry Lorayne, ISBN 0-316-53268-1.

"*What Smart Students Know*," Adam Robinson, ISBN 0-517-88085-7.

### **Home Schooling**

*The Big Book of Home Learning*, Mary Pride. This book has about everything you need to know about home schooling. Call 1-800-3-HOME-22.

There is no end of information about home schooling on the Internet. Too many sites to list.

### **Cultural Literacy**

E. D. Hirsch has written several wonderful books on this subject. Included are texts such as *What Your 1st Grader Should Know*, *What Your 2nd Grader Should Know*," and so forth. Doubleday. Whether you home school or not, you must have this wonderful series.

### **Other Stuff**

LOGO - a computer language that was invented just for children. Frankly, there is nothing like this, making it a MUST have. It teaches word processing, logical thinking skills, spacial intelligence, and so much more. For ages

two and up. About \$100 and worth every nickel. For ages five and up. Call 800-774-LOGO.

Encyclopedias--- Because of its larger print and conversational tone, I like Grolier's Book Of Knowledge for kids 13 and under. For those older than 13, I recommend World Book. In no case, do I like any encyclopedia on CD ROM. Kids should be able to curl up in bed with a book, not a monitor.

Childcraft by World Book is a compendium of stories and poems that I highly recommend for children twelve and under.

For the best book on elementary education ever written, get *The Educated Child*. By Bennett, Finn, and Cribb. It's an absolute treasure chest of educational information for parents. The writing is superb...no incomprehensible educationese...never boring and often deliciously candid.

The Magic Feather, Bill and Lori Granger. Dutton. Everything you must know about the special ed and learning disabilities industry. Watch out, this book will give you heartburn, the hives, and nightmares.

OZZIE- A terrific computer word game for the PC. Originally created to help Scrabble(r) players practice

their anagramming skills, it has an additional level designed for kids and their spelling skills. It took two years out of my life to create it; the least you could do is buy it. See: [www.ozziegame.cjb.net](http://www.ozziegame.cjb.net). For ages five and up. A Wonderkid can handle it at three. To order: E-mail me at: [WonderkidzMK@aol.com](mailto:WonderkidzMK@aol.com).

The OLD WITCH stories. A collection of my best Old Witch stories. See sample story in Appendix 2. For four to ten year olds. To order: [WonderkidzMK@aol.com](mailto:WonderkidzMK@aol.com).

GOTCHA! This is my one of a kind and highly addictive math card game. Nothing will bathe your kid's brain in numbers anywhere near as much as GOTCHA! For four years old and up. Order by E-mailing me.

## APPENDIX 2

The following is an Old Witch story like the ones I used to tell my son. The stories all contained a few or more plot lines, usually contained one or more moral lessons, several college level words, and adult themes. Above all, I tried to make them interesting.

\* \* \*

Once upon a time there was a five year old girl by the name of Sally the Sagacious. One day after school, Sally the Sagacious asked her mother if she could go visit her best friend in the whole wide world, the Old Witch. Mom said yes, so Sally the Sagacious walked over to the Old Witch's house, knocked on the door and said, " Old Witch, Old Witch, this is Sally the Sagacious, may I please come in?" Sally the Sagacious knew that the Old Witch would not let her in unless she said the magic word, "please."

The door opened slowly. Sally the Sagacious first saw the familiar long white hair and then giggled when she saw that the Old Witch was wearing her Wednesday dress, the fluffy yellow tutu that came almost down to her ankles and sometimes made her trip. "It's Sally the Sagacious!, the Old Witch called out. "I'm so glad to see you. Come on in Sally, you are just in time for lunch. Are you hungry?"

"I AM RAVENOUSI, " she cried out loudly. "What did Chef Count Morbid make today?"

"Egg salad sandwiches and some brie cheese from France. Plus we have a new drink called ficklepickle juice that our new friend Farfelfarken from the planet Farkelenia gave us." Sally the Sagacious looked at the bottle of bright green ficklepickle juice and thought to herself, *this green stuff looks awful. I wonder if it really tastes good.* "Old Witch, why do you always call me Sally the Sagacious?"

"It's because you are so very very smart. That's what the word sagacious means." The Old Witch bent down and gave Sally the Sagacious a big hug and kiss and said, "Do you know how very special you are to me and everyone else who lives in my house?"

"Is Rumpel special too?" asked Sally the Sagacious.

"Everyone who lives in my house or visits me is very special. Even the smelly 'OI Dragon."

Sally asked, "How can Rumpel be special? He doesn't have white skin like you and me."

The Old Witch frowned and then told Sally the Sagacious to close her eyes for a second and then open them again. When she did, Sally looked at the old Witch and almost fell over in surprise because her skin was now bright yellow! *What happened to the Old Witch's skin?*

The Old Witch knew that Sally the Sagacious was confused by her new skin color but she preferred not to explain it to Sally the Sagacious just yet. First, it was time to serve the ficklepickle juice to everyone at the lunch table.

She first poured a glass of the green goo to Mr. Googolplex the math genius, then the Weasel, Sally the Sagacious, Count Morbid the Vampire, Rumpel, the Wizard, Tatiana the Terrific, Slobbola, Hypatia, Skinnyminnie the skeleton, Farfelfarken, and lastly some for herself.

"Before you drink she said to everyone, "Our new friend Mister Farfelfarken from the planet Farkelenia in the Andromeda galaxy and has something to say to everyone."

Farfelfarken is a tree-like being from the planet Farkelenia which is many trillions of miles from our own planet Earth. Or at least he looks like a tree...or maybe she looks like a tree.

Farfelfarken spoke: "A few of your earth weeks ago I was sent on a mission by our leader, Queen Farkenbarkenlarkentarken to explore the universe and find beautiful things to take back to Farkelenia. That's why I am here on your pretty little planet. While traveling in space in the worm hole express, I just happened to hear some of your Earth music on my intergalactic radio. I could not resist coming here and listening to more of it. I then sent a message to Queen Farkenbarkenlarkentarken to tell her about your wonderful music. I even sent her a recording of

Beethoven's 5th Symphony which our Queen immediately fell in love with. This morning I received a message from Queen Farkenbarkenlarkentarken telling me to stay on Earth as long as necessary to get copies of all your music. Everyone on Farkelenia just loves Mister Beethoven!!"

During Mister Farfelfarken's speech, Sally the Sagacious's mind was still thinking about the Old Witch's new yellow skin. It *disconcerted* her. She thought to herself, "Gosh, *The Old Witch used to have white skin, not brown skin. What is going on around here?*"

Farfelfarken continued speaking: "Because you let me stay at your home on Earth and listen to your music, our leader, Queen Farkenbarkenlarkentarken, has instructed me to give you some ficklepickle juice. I hope you enjoy it as much as we Farkelenians are enjoying Beethoven's music. Drink up everyone!"

Everyone at the lunch table drank the green goo. No one said a word. All were quiet until Rumble, the little gremlin with the big belly said in a booming voice, "I LOVE THIS GREEN GOOEY STUFF!!!! I WANT MORE!!!!!! PLEASE. PLEASE!"

Then Sally the Sagacious said something that everyone instantly agreed with. "We should share this wonderful drink with the rest of the world." When he heard what Sally the Sagacious said, Farfelfarken started to beam with pride. The Old Witch also felt good about Sally the

Sagacious's idea because she believed in sharing. In fact, the Old Witch went over to Sally and gave her a big hug. Then Rumpel did the same thing.

After lunch, everyone went to their rooms for some silent reading time. But not Sally the Sagacious. She had something on her mind besides reading and ficklepickle juice. "Old Witch," she said. "Can we have a little chat?"

"About the ficklepickle juice?" replied the Old Witch.

"No, I want to know what happened to your white skin. Why is your skin now so yellow?"

"Please close your eyes for a few seconds, Sally the Sagacious."

Sally the Sagacious closed her eyes as the Old Witch requested. "Now open them" said the Old Witch.

"OH MY GOSH OLD WITCH, YOUR SKIN IS NOW BROWN LIKE RUMPLE!"

The Old Witch spoke again. "Sally my sweet child, do you still like me? Am I still your friend even though I now have brown skin?"

"Well, yes Old Witch."

"Then why do you care what color my skin is...I am still your friend the Old Witch, no matter what color I am."

Then Sally the Sagacious said, "But you used to have white skin... then yellow... and now it's brown!"

"Oh Sally, I like all the skin colors. And because of my color magic, I can be whatever color I wish to be. Maybe I will be orange tomorrow and green the next day like ficklepickle juice. But no matter what color I am, I will still be your friend, won't I?"

Sally the Sagacious replied, "You will always be my friend Old Witch no matter what your skin color is. But, what is your real color?"

"I can't remember." replied the Old Witch with a smile on her face. "I've changed my skin color so many times in the last 300 years, that I just don't know."

After an hour passed and everybody was finished with their silent reading, Sally the Sagacious decided to make a ficklepickle juice stand outside the Old Witches' house and share ficklepickle juice with anyone who might be walking by. While the Old Witch really liked the idea of sharing, something told her that Sally's idea might cause her some trouble. But she ignored the warning in her mind and proceeded to help Sally the Sagacious put up the stand and sign that read, "COME ONE, COME ALL...FREE FICKLEPICKLE JUICE FOR EVERYONE IN CHICAGO!"

Within a few hours, there were 10 people waiting in line for a free sample of the new green drink. After another hour there were fifty people and Sally the Sagacious's arms were starting to get tired from pouring so many glasses of ficklepickle juice. Another hour passed and now there must have been two hundred people who were waiting! Everyone just loved the green goo. "Old Witch," said Sally the Sagacious, "ficklepickle juice is certainly popular, but Rurple and I am too tired to continue all this pouring. Can we stop and take a rest?"

The Old Witch now realized that the new drink from the planet Farkelenia was going to cause problems because of its popularity. What started out to be a fun little project was now turning into something quite different.

When Sally the Sagacious and Rurple stopped pouring free glasses of the ficklepickle juice, the people started to complain loudly, "WE WANT FICKLEPICKLE...WE WANT MORE FICKLEPICKLE JUICE!!!! The Old Witch then had to start pouring the stuff with the help of Count Morbid the Vampire.

But then suddenly the supply of ficklepickle juice was all gone. All two hundred gallons that Farfelfarken gave them was used up. "WHEW!" Said the Old Witch, "now our problems are over". There just isn't anymore ficklepickle juice. So she announced to everyone outside her house..."Hey everyone, we have no more ficklepickle juice .... please go

home." Very slowly everyone started to leave, but they sure didn't look happy about it.

For two weeks the Old Witch had no more problems with ficklepickle juice and all those people. All was quiet at her home except for all the music coming from Farfelfarken's bedroom. That made her happy as she loved good music. After a few days, she and everyone else in the her home forgot about ficklepickle juice.

But one morning she was suddenly awoken by shouts from outside her bedroom window. WE WANT MORE FICKLEPICKLE JUICE!!!!....WE WANT MORE FICKLEPICKLE....WE WANT MORE HAIR!!! MORE HAIR!!!! MORE HAIR!! WE LOVE HAIR!!!

The Old Witch didn't understand what was going on...and what was this demand for hair? Suddenly she knew that today was going to most certainly be a very bad day. She got dressed real fast and ran outside to find out why all those people came back. Didn't she tell everyone that there was no more ficklepickle juice?

The Wizard was already there when she got there. She looked at him and she couldn't believe it...the Wizard was laughing about something! Actually laughing, something he rarely did. Now the Old Witch was really perplexed. "Please Wizard, tell me what's going on. What did these people tell you?"

Still laughing, the wizard replied, " Old Witch, you won't believe this, but all the men were bald last week. Look at them now. They all have hair and claim that the ficklepickle juice did it."

The Old Witch looked at the men and began to laugh. She couldn't believe that ficklepickle juice from far away Farkelenia would grow hair on bald heads. "But we do not have anymore ficklepickle juice." she announced to the crowd of men. "I just can't help you."

One very polite bald man stepped forward from the crowd. He took the Old Witch's hand and then said, "Could you please try and get some more Ficklepickle juice for us bald men. Pretty please?" The Old Witch told him that she would try. She thought to herself, "*Will Farfelfarken give us some more ficklepickle juice?*"

\* \* \*

Coming up...the petulant Princess Barkenfarkenlarken has a snit.