

# extra fingers

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PHOTO: PETER PARKS

## Is this all we know Africa for?

**AMELIE**, referring to a seagull that was helping itself to some chips:  
"Look, Dad. It's acting like an African child."

## Is that even possible?

**AMELIE:** "Dad, I'm learning about what's a bad joke and what's a good joke. So, can you do a joke right now? Is that even possible?"

## Just put up with it

**AMELIE,** walking home from her swimming lesson: "This girl, she was, like . . . she's only seven and she was, um . . . you know how we were doing the races?"

**DAD:** "Yes."

To be honest, I had been asleep on a patch of grass while Amelie was swimming the day before.

**AMELIE:** "And we were kicking? She was, like, 'It's not fair! I'm always kicking against you and you're ten years old and you're, like, three years older than me.' I'm, like, 'it's not my fault!' That's what I was thinking. And then she was, like . . . she was, like, 'It's not fair! I don't want you racing against me. My mum made me.' She wasn't crying but she was, like, close to."

**DAD:** "Yeah."

**AMELIE:** "She was on the verge of it."

**DAD:** "Oh my gosh!"

**AMELIE:** "Then we had to do another one [race] and, um, she started crying."

**DAD:** "Oh. Gosh!"

**AMELIE:** "And then the teacher had to, like, comfort her and stuff."

**DAD:** "Yeah."

**AMELIE:** "And, um, then I was just, like, 'There are worse things to be crying about. Just put up with it!'"

**DAD:** "Absolutely."

**AMELIE:** "For god's sake!"

**DAD:** "Yeah."

**AMELIE:** "If someone's faster than you then, like, why don't you just train? If you want to be better than them then do better."

**DAD:** "Don't complain about it."

**AMELIE:** "I know. And then, um, she was crying and then her mum's, like, 'What's wrong, honey? What's wrong?' She's, like, 'I don't want to do swimming!' And I'm, like, *(rolls eyes)* 'Oh!' And then, um, she said [to the swimming teacher], 'Can you not make her do the backstroke?'"

**DAD:** "So who was this? The parent?"

**AMELIE:** "Yeah. She said, 'Don't make her do backstroke, she doesn't like it.'"

**DAD:** "Oh."

**AMELIE:** "She told him she hates it. But we had to do it for races. And then she had to do freestyle. I told her there's worse things to be crying about than just doing swimming. Stop complaining. That's what I told her. She didn't like me after that. I'm, like, 'I don't care'. She wasn't even nice anyway. I don't think she'll be doing swimming anymore because her mum's, like, *(in a mocking tone)* 'You don't have to do it anymore.'"

## ADVENTURE WORLD

### At least you have a story to tell

Amelie asked me if I could go get her towel that she'd left at another part of Adventure World. She assured me that if I did she'd wait for me before going on any more rides. Needless to say, as it took me about three minutes to find her towel and return, she wasn't there when I got back.

# Touchy subject

Karin rarely goes to the girls' school. With me going so often, she simply doesn't feel it necessary. At the school's Eisteddfod, however, Karin did attend one of the days.

A **FRIEND OF HOLLY'S** on that special occasion: "Holly, is that your mum?"

**HOLLY:** "Yeah."

**HOLLY'S FRIEND:** "Oh. I thought it might've been a, you know, bit of a touchy subject."

**DAD**, about half an hour later, after finally catching up with Amelie: "Hey! I thought you said you'd wait."

**AMELIE:** "Oh . . . sorry, Dad. Whoops! What'd you end up doing?"

**DAD:** "Oh, I mostly went on the mats."

**AMELIE**, half raising an eyebrow: "Well . . . at least you now have a story to tell."

## Just like that

**DAD** to **AMELIE**, on the way to school: "Where are you going? What are you doing there? There's a car coming!"

**AMELIE**, insouciantly: "I know."

**DAD**, after waving through a car that had stopped: "Now go."

**AMELIE:** "I know. I'm on the island."

**DAD:** "Yeah, but you don't go on the opposite side of the road and ride towards a car, darl."

**AMELIE:** "Sorry."

**DAD:** "Well . . . that's crazy."

**AMELIE:** "I didn't realise."

**DAD:** "What do you mean, 'didn't realise'? Of course you don't go—"

**AMELIE:** "I know you don't do it. I just wanted to talk to you."

**DAD:** "I know, but, you do that all the time. You've—"

**AMELIE:** "I know, but you can go to the island. It's safe."

**DAD:** "You're talking to me and not concentrating on riding."

**AMELIE:** "Dad, see that tree just there?"

**DAD:** "Just like that."

**AMELIE:** "Dad, that tree?"

**DAD:** "Yep."

**AMELIE:** "Um, Emily took a really really good photo, well I thought it was really good, of, you know those cheeky birds?"

**DAD:** "The cheeky bird. Yep."

**AMELIE:** "When they swoop down on you . . ."

## It's easy to make up anything

**AMELIE**, as we walked past a church: "What's that?"

**DAD**: "That's a place of worship."

**AMELIE**: "What do you do?"

**DAD**: "Well it's like a chapel or a church."

**AMELIE**: "Oh. Thought so."

**DAD**: "In fact, it's their type of church. It's the Bahai faith."

**AMELIE**: "Oh. So everyone there is religious?"

**DAD**: "Well, yes. They follow a religion so, yes, they're religious."

**AMELIE**: "Do you have to pay to do it?"

**DAD**: "Ah, no, I wouldn't think so."

**AMELIE**: "Oh."

**DAD**: "You wouldn't be forced to pay, no. You could start your own religion."

**AMELIE**: "But I don't want to."

**DAD**: "Okay. You don't have to."

**AMELIE**: "There's nothing to believe in."

**DAD**: "Hmm-hmm. Do you think all the gods have already been made up? The different kinds of gods?"

**AMELIE**: "Yeah."

**DAD**: "Maybe you could come up with your own."

**AMELIE**, referring to Isabella and our dog, Angus, who had fallen well behind: "Oh my god! Hurry up!"

**DAD**: "Well there's one. You were just talking to your god then. You went, 'Oh my god!'"

**AMELIE**: "Stop it, Dad! You're so with the jokes."

**DAD**: "Do you think you could make up a god?"

**AMELIE**: "Dad!"

**DAD**: "From scratch?"

**AMELIE**: "It's easy to make up anything."

## You should do yoga, Dad

**AMELIE**, after watching Karin do yoga: "Dad, you should do that?"

**DAD**: "What? Yoga?"

**AMELIE**: "Yeah. Otherwise you're going to be all sore and disgusting."

**DAD**, flabbergasted: "What!"

**AMELIE**: "That's what Mum said."

**DAD**: "Did she say that?"

**AMELIE**: "Yes."

**DAD**: "That's a direct quote, is it? They're the exact words she used?"

**AMELIE**: "No. But she did say you should do it and I think she's right."

## The one thank-you you won't get

**AMELIE**, at the dinner table: "Dad, you know when I'm going to thank you for all the things you've done for me in my life?"

**DAD**: "No. When?"

# You're not that good a fighter

At around 8pm one night, I received a phone call from Holly who was up the road at friend's place, requesting I come immediately and walk her home.

**DAD to AMELIE, moments later:** "Ams, do you want to walk up the street with me to get Hols?"

**AMELIE:** "No. Not really."

**DAD:** "Oh, why?"

**AMELIE:** "Because you're not that good a fighter."

**AMELIE:** "When I die. Although you'll probably be dead by then, won't you? Make it when you die. I'll say 'thank you' for everything at your funeral. If I end up going. I don't like funerals. They're too sad."

## It wasn't that simple

Amelie woke Karin at 4.30 one morning. She came all the way down from her bedroom to where Karin was to get her to go up to her room and shut her window for her because the wind outside was making it rattle a lot and it was really annoying her.

**DAD to AMELIE, later on that morning:** "Why didn't you just shut it yourself?"

**AMELIE:** "Well I thought if I came down to where Mum was — you were fast asleep — and told her she'd be able to solve it."

**DAD:** "Yes but it would have been so simple for you to solve. Why didn't you just shut the window yourself and allow Mum to keep sleeping? How hard would that have been for you to do?"

**AMELIE:** "Not that hard. But . . . outside my window there was water dripping onto the ground."

**DAD:** "Rainwater?"

**AMELIE:** "Yeah. It was dripping really loudly. And I was also having this dream where I was getting married and the person I was getting married to — there were these footsteps scraping along the ground and they were taking so long to get to me — just wouldn't come. I thought to myself, 'Oh, go away! So annoying! You're taking so long to get to me.' So then I just thought . . . I didn't know what to do so I came down to where you were because I thought you or Mum would be able to solve it."

**DAD:** "Solve what?"

**AMELIE:** "The sound of the scraping feet. The water going onto the ground outside my window sounded just like scraping feet."

**DAD, somewhat perplexed:** "Yes but all you had to do was just shut the window. Yourself. I can't get away from how easy it would have been for you to fix the problem. It would have been so simple for you to do that. Because look what you did instead. You walked all the way down through our house in the dark to where we were, which normally would have been too much for you to do because you would have been too

# So out!

**AMELIE:** "Dad, today we finally worked out Mrs Huff's age. We'd been trying all day . . . um, well, not exactly. We'd been trying all through Spelling and Art. But then, finally, someone got it. Someone said 'twenty-eight' and she said 'yes'. So she's twenty-eight. Someone actually thought she was fifty-nine. Fifty-nine! That was so out!"

scared of the dark and creaky floorboards. Rather than waking Mum up who then couldn't get back to sleep, you just had to go over to your window and pull it down."

**AMELIE:** "Oh, Dad, you don't understand. It wasn't that simple. I was in the middle of a dream. There was so much going on."

## I haven't learned anything

Amelie's class had to each prepare a slideshow about an historical event of their choice. They were required to make a certain number of slides, however, there were no instructions on word length.

**DAD to AMELIE:** "So, when they tell you you've got to do pages of writing, what you do when you haven't got enough words is you, well, for starters, you start off with 18 [point] size font."

**AMELIE:** "Yeah. But it's actually too small. I actually have to go to, like, 30 or sometimes 40. Um, my friend, she was doing . . . well, she's not really my friend but, anyway. She was doing a slideshow about America. And, um, she'd done four sentences for one of her slides . . . like, each slide was, like, four sentences. And it was, like, type 30. It looked like it was so big."

**DAD:** "So what happened? How did she finish the assignment?"

**AMELIE:** "Um, so, she had at the end of the

slideshow, it was, like, lots of smiley faces. And so she said, 'I hope you learned a lot about America.' And I was just thinking, 'I haven't learned anything.'"

## C'mon. Start!

On Saturday mornings at Amelie's Sinfonietta Orchestra practice, the organisers put out biscuits for the kids to have during their break. Within the orchestra, however, it's become common knowledge that one girl will always leave early — eight minutes to be precise — under the pretext of needing to go to the toilet just so she can get to the front of the line for those biscuits. It was causing the orchestra some problems.

**DAD to AMELIE:** "What is so special about these biscuits?"

**AMELIE:** "They're so yummy."

**HOLLY:** "Everyone wants the biscuits."

**AMELIE:** "They're actually really yum. It's, like . . . so everyone lines up. You have to have the line and then there's, like, chocolate biscuits."

**HOLLY:** "It's those Arnott's biscuits."

**DAD:** "Oh yeah."

**AMELIE:** "And then there's the shortbreads. They're the best."

**HOLLY:** "Yeah I know. I never get the shortbreads but—"

**DAD:** “So the girl that goes to the toilet she gets the biscuits first?”

**AMELIE:** “Yeah. She always gets the chocolate ones and the shortbreads.”

**DAD:** “Why doesn’t someone say something?”

**AMELIE:** “Um, because, I don’t know. They just, like, I don’t know. Everyone’s really weird in my Sinfonietta [Orchestra].”

**DAD:** “But they know what’s going on. They know what’s going on with the biscuits, don’t they?”

**AMELIE:** “Yes. Everyone does. Everyone’s, like, she’s getting the biscuits all the time.”

**DAD:** “Yes, exactly. You know the situation.”

**AMELIE:** “Everyone’s timing her with their watches. They’re, like, ‘C’mon. Start now.’”

## How to handle calls from India

by Amelie, aged 10

**DAD** to **AMELIE**, after she’d finished talking to an Indian fellow from, well, probably India: “So what happened? What happened on the phone?”

**AMELIE:** “Um, there was this Indian guy—”

**DAD:** “Yep.”

**AMELIE:** “. . . and he was, like, ‘Hello? Hello?’ And I’m, like, ‘Hello? Hello?’ And then he said, ‘Hi.’ And then he said, ‘How are you?’ And I said, ‘I’m great.’ And then he said, ‘That’s great’. And then he said, ‘We’re not selling anything.’ And then, um, he said, ‘Can I talk to your parents?’ And I said, ‘Well, they’re out’ (and you guys weren’t). I said, ‘So you can’t talk to them.’ And then he said, ‘No, no, we’re not selling anything! Please!’ And then, um, I said, ‘Well, I don’t believe you.’ I said, ‘I think you are.’ And then, um, I said, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’ Because he was just saying random things. Because he said something that I couldn’t understand because his accent was interfering with the words he was saying.”

**DAD:** “Hmm.”

**AMELIE:** “And then, um, I was, like, I said to him, ‘I don’t know what you are talking about. Goodbye!’ And then I put it [the receiver] down but he was, like, he was sort of talking because I hadn’t put it down properly so he was saying all this random stuff. And then it went off. Because I put it back.”

**DAD:** “You put the receiver back properly?”

**AMELIE:** “Yeah. I was going to say you were on the toilet but then I wasn’t going to.”

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## LAST WORD

# Even if you cheat . . .

**AMELIE**, after cutting a corner during a fun run: “Even if you cheat you still get a ribbon.”