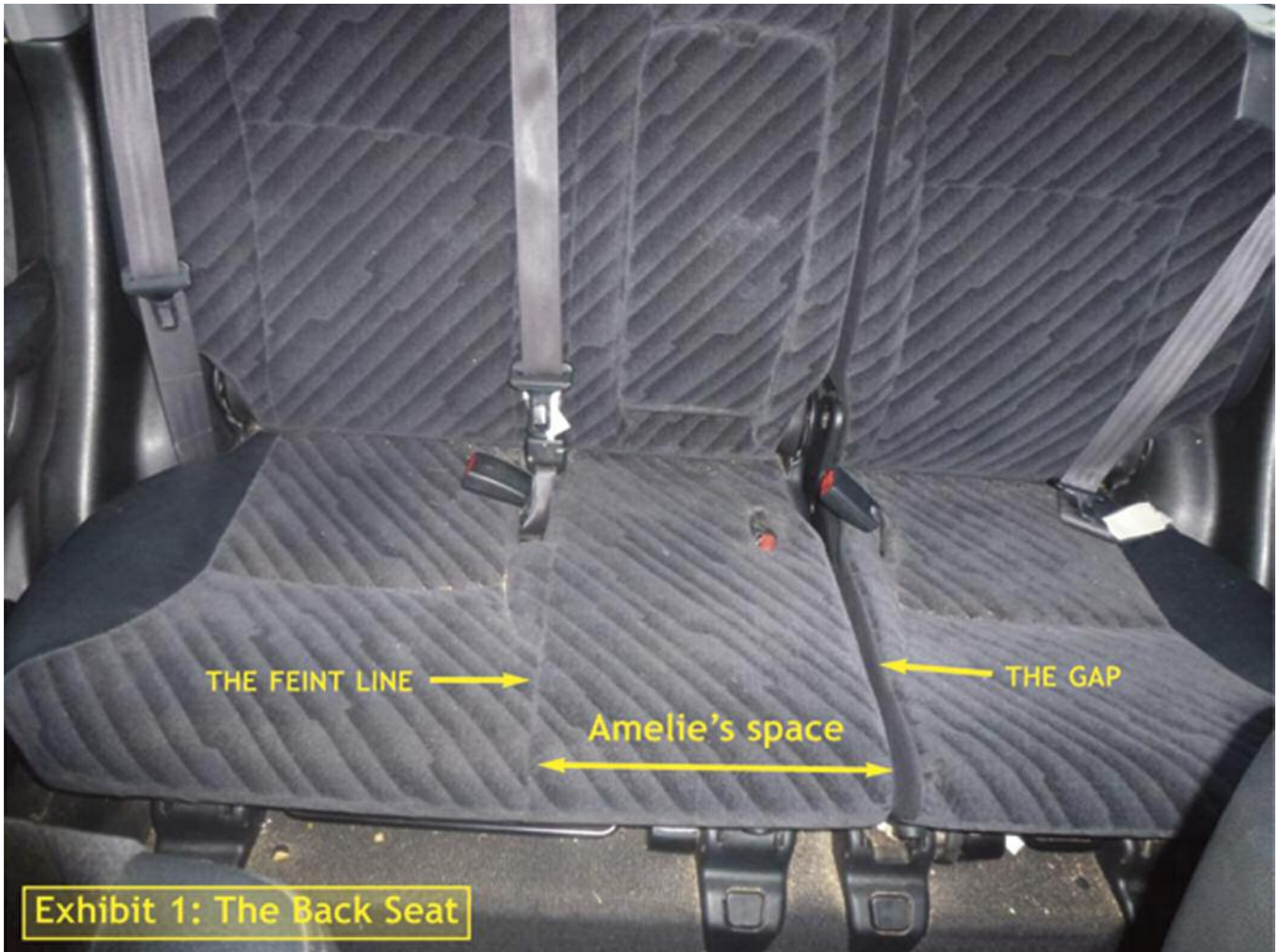


extra fingers

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The origin of all territorial disputes?

On road trips, especially long ones, the back seat of our car soon becomes disputed territory. It isn't long before the two biggest kids decide how the space should be divided up. Not that this is new, of course. Bigger nations have been doing it to smaller nations for centuries. So much so that our car trip to Bluff Knoll in WA's Stirling Ranges three weeks ago had more in common with how Europe looked following World War One and the ill-fated 1919 Treaty of Versailles. In other words, territory was determined based simply on what Holly and Isabella wanted.

Where, then, did that leave Amelie? Well, about twenty-three centimetres within which to deposit herself! It was bound to trigger a dispute or two.

DAD, asking Holly about what typically takes place in the back seat during long trips: "So, what sort of things do you guys fight over?"

HOLLY: "Lines."

DAD: "Lines? What, do you mean you fight over 'lines'?"

HOLLY: “Well, Issy’s and Amie’s seat, like, there’s a seam between them. So, the seam becomes Issy’s line.”

DAD: “The seam is Issy’s line. Okay.”

Holly: “And, my seat is not next to Amie’s . . .”

DAD: “Right, there’s a gap.”

HOLLY: “Yeah, there’s a gap. And Amie, I get cross at her because she shoves chips and stuff down the gap.”

DAD: “Yeah.”

HOLLY: “So, that’s why she’s not allowed to pass that line. My line’s more obvious than Issy’s so sometimes Issy doesn’t notice.”

DAD: “When Amelie goes over her line she doesn’t notice?”

HOLLY: “Sometimes. Because it’s really really feint.”

DAD: “But look how little space Amelie has.”

HOLLY: “Yeah, because she’s little. So we put her in the middle.”

DAD: “So, is she allowed to go over your space in the air?”

HOLLY: “No.”

Dad: “Not in the air either? So, it extends all the way to the roof of the car?”

HOLLY: “Yeah.”

DAD: “Okay.”

Holly: “That’s why we got cross with her when she was putting the pillows on our side. And she sometimes brings all her stuff over and, like, puts it on us. So, yeah. She’s not allowed to do that.”

DAD: “Has she agreed to these lines?”

HOLLY: “I don’t know. She never really agreed, we just made her do it.”

DAD: “Right. So this is what causes all the pain and suffering on car trips. It’s all because Amelie goes over these, in one case, a very feint line and in the other case, this gap. Is that right?”

HOLLY: “Yep.”

Now, Isabella’s turn . . .

DAD: “How come you guys fight? What’s the reason for all your fighting in the car?”

ISABELLA: “I don’t know. We just fight.”

DAD: “Why do you start a fight? What’s it over?”

ISABELLA: “Nothing much. Just, like, food or something.”

DAD: “Yeah. But Holly says you have certain lines that each of you have to stay between.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah.”

DAD: “Well, what are your lines?”

Isabella points to a seam line on her seat.

DAD: “That seam?”

ISABELLA: “That’s all I have. She just can’t go past that line.”

DAD: “Who’s she?”

ISABELLA: “Amelie.”

DAD: “Amelie can’t go past that line? Alright, where can Amelie go? What’s her space?”

ISABELLA: “We’re allowed in her space.”

DAD: “You’re allowed in her space but she’s not allowed in yours? Well, that’s not very fair.”

ISABELLA: “Yes, it is actually.”

DAD: “Why?”

ISABELLA: “We need some more space because we’re bigger than her.”

DAD: “Yeah, but look how little her space is. It’s ridiculously small. I’m going to get a ruler out and measure that space that she’s allowed.”

ISABELLA: “It’s about one ruler.”

DAD: “Yeah, it’s about a ruler. She has to, on car trips . . . sometimes these trips can be four and five hundred kilometres. But she’s got to stay between the length of a ruler? Do you think that’s fair?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah.”

DAD: “What?”

ISABELLA, emphatically: “She has to sit like this (*demonstrates*).”

DAD: “With her feet up?”

ISABELLA: “Unless she wants to have them down.”

DAD: “Oh, she’s allowed to have them down?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, but she’s not allowed to do this (*demonstrates*).”

DAD: “She’s not allowed to have her feet up on the seat in front because, in the air, her feet might go over your space?”

ISABELLA: “It gets really annoying if her legs are crossing over me.”

DAD: “So you have ‘air space’ that she’s not allowed to cross into?”

ISABELLA: “Well, she’s not allowed to have her feet up here otherwise I get to have the jellies [little fruit treats].”

DAD: “Right. She’s not allowed to invade your ‘air space’. Is that right?”

ISABELLA: “Hmm. Or put stuff in our pockets [the seat pockets at the back of the front seats].”

DAD: “Right. It’s a very, um, narrow space for her to be allowed into. And you’re happy with that?”

ISABELLA: “Yep.”

And now, finally, Amelie’s turn . . .

DAD: “Hi Amelie. I want to ask you a question about the space you’re allowed in the back of the car when we’re going on trips. What the big kids allow you. Holly and Isabella. What’s the space you’re allowed? Tell me.”

AMELIE, showing me: “This is Issy’s line.”

DAD: “That faint little seam line, yep.”

AMELIE: “And this is Holly’s big chunk line.”

DAD: “Big chunk of a line, yes.”

AMELIE: “And I’ve got this space.”

DAD: “You’ve got that space there. Do you think that’s a fair space for you to sit in?”

AMELIE: “No.”

DAD: “What would you like?”

AMELIE: “Um, I’m going to sticky tape a line and I’m going to join it to another line.”

DAD: “Right. So, you are going to try and widen your space?”

AMELIE: “Yep.”

Like I said, countries and border disputes.

Can a girl marry a girl?

AMELIE: "I'm going to have a kid with my husband one day."

DAD: "Are you?"

AMELIE: "That I'm going to marry."

DAD: "Okay. So who are you going to marry?"

AMELIE: "I don't know."

DAD: "Really? Haven't you worked it out yet?"

AMELIE: "No. Can you marry a girl?"

DAD: "Um."

AMELIE: "If you're a girl and you wanted to marry a girl?"

DAD: "Right. Can you marry a girl? Um, you're not allowed to in our country yet. They won't let you."

AMELIE, plaintively: "Why?"

DAD: "Well, they haven't given a good reason. They just say that it's not what we've always done. Do you think that's a good reason?"

AMELIE: "No. Why can't you do it?"

DAD: "Well, they just say that marriage has to be between a man and a woman."

AMELIE, exasperatedly: "Why?"

DAD: "Well, it's just how they see it. What do you think?"

AMELIE: "Jordan said she drew a love heart once and she said, 'I love Amelie.'"

DAD: "Right. Yeah."

AMELIE: "And I'm going to say to her, 'Did you know that girls can not marry girls?'"

DAD: "Yeah, well, that's how it is at the

moment. They're not allowed to."

AMELIE: "But hopefully they'll change it."

DAD: "Well, I think they will. What about if a man wanted to marry a man? Would you think that's okay?"

AMELIE, contemplatively: "A man wanted to marry a man. Yeah, it'd be alright."

A gush of annoyance

One morning I caught Holly and Isabella each dressed only in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt sitting right on top of the heater with all its bars on. Good thing I pass by the art studio a little more often than once a season. If not, I'm sure they would have happily sat there until the heat of a Perth summer made it unbearable – even for them.

ISABELLA to Holly, as I approached: "Oh no! Here comes a gush of annoyance."

Anywhere will do

AMELIE, in response my being angry with her for not listening to the music she should have been listening to for her cello practice: "I will get anywhere!"

Addictions

Isabella: "I can't believe we need sleep every single night."

DAD: "Well, it's just the way we have evolved. Our bodies need that amount of sleep to recover from the day and repair parts of the body."

ISABELLA: "It's only one day!"

DAD: "Yeah, but—"

ISABELLA: "And then I need a break. In my body I'm just thinking . . . like, sometimes at night I just think I can't go to sleep, I'm so energetic I need to listen to music and play. And if it is daytime I can never sleep properly. Because the sun's, like, shining in my eyes. But when it's night-time, um, the moon comes out and there's very little light

and then it's quite nice [for going to sleep] . . . I like the afternoon of the day when it's just cool and there's a light breeze and everything and there's a sunset. I really like that time of the day."

DAD: "Do you?"

ISABELLA: "Or I like the morning. Because it's all misty and beautiful in the morning. I like how there's, like, fog. I love fog! It's so cool."

DAD: "What's so good about fog?"

ISABELLA: "I don't know. There's just something about it. You know how once, after a storm, we just saw all this mist and it looked like Harry Potter? [The opening scene from the first Harry Potter movie] That was so cool! And I love seeing my breath. I feel like I'm smoking. Taylor wants to try a cigarette one day. Like, she doesn't want to do it actually, she only wants to, like, not really breathe it in."

DAD: "Do you want to try a cigarette one day?"

ISABELLA: "I don't know. I think it would be so disgusting that I would nearly vomit. How can people get addicted to it? How can people go (*demonstrates a smoker inhaling and exhaling cigarette smoke*) and look so relaxed? I mean my body would just go, 'er, get out, so disgusting!' Dad, if the body doesn't like it, why are they [our brain cells, presumably] trying to control you to get more? I don't understand that. If the lungs don't like it, why is the brain wanting more?"

The bed bugs video will do

It was 10pm the night before we were leaving for our trip to Bluff Knoll and I'd told Isabella there'd be no Friday night movie because we had an early start the next day.

ISABELLA: "Alright, what about the seven minute thing?"

DAD: "The seven minute thing? Oh, you mean that short video about how to spot bed bugs in hotels*. You'd even watch that, would you?"

ISABELLA: "Yeah, I'll have that."

DAD: "You're kidding!"

ISABELLA: "Well, if that's all I have a choice between. I mean, if it's a choice between that and nothing then I'll easily go for it."

* I'd been watching an online video about how to spot bed bugs since we'd be staying in a caravan overnight on the trip to Bluff Knoll.

THE BLUFF KNOLL TRIP

Just from the car, not literally

ISABELLA, on the way to Kojonup, looking at fields of canola growing along both sides of the road: "I want to run through it, Dad. I want to lie in it."

DAD: "Alright, c'mon then."

ISABELLA: "Dad!"

DAD: "No, I'm serious."

ISABELLA: "But they sell canola for money and wouldn't want us lying on it."

DAD: "Issy! It'll be fine."

ISABELLA: "Dad, I meant from the car. I meant that I wanted to run through it and lie on it from the car."

HOLLY, following on apathetically: "I did it in Year Five, Dad, so there's no way I'm doing it again."

Anyone can breathe

We'd been pulled over by the police for a breath test.

ISABELLA: "Why did they want you to do that for, Dad? Anyone can breathe if they're not dead already."

My lunar friend

ISABELLA, in the Stirling Ranges, needing to leave the caravan for a moment to go outside [It was 7pm]: "I wish that moon would look after me."

DAD: "How would it do that, Issy?"

ISABELLA: "By being right next to me."

Immaterial

AMELIE, holding her nose after a sneeze on the way to Katanning: "Quick, Holly! I need a tissue."

HOLLY: "But there are none left."

AMELIE: "I don't care if there's none left!"

LAST WORD

You chose to

ISABELLA, wanting us to stop to buy some food: "You chose to have kids, Dad, so you have to buy them stuff."