

extra fingers

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Dad not sneezing was not to be sneezed at

AMELIE to Dad, on the way to a birthday party: "I've never seen you sneeze."

DAD: "Haven't you?"

AMELIE: "No. Not even in winter. I've never seen you go ah-choo in winter whereas I go ah-choo in winter all the time."

DAD: "Hmm. Well, I can assure you I do definitely sneeze. Everyone does."

AMELIE: "Yeah, I know. So that's why I'm wondering where you do your sneezes."

DAD: "I don't know. I never remember my sneezes because they're not that big a deal."

AMELIE: "Yes they are, Dad. I'll watch you and see if I can remember where you sneeze."

The Joy of Running

The Joy of Running is the title of a book that enjoyed considerable success in the 1970s because it showed the reader the benefits of long-distance running not only to the body, but to one's psychological health as well. Always missing, however, from its list of adherents, will be Isabella. She can't understand why anyone would want to put themselves through such a torturous undertaking as long-distance anything, let alone running.

This was Isabella just ten hours after she'd told her physical education teacher how happy she was to have made it into the school's cross-country team.

ISABELLA, with a look of steely determination: "Next year I hope I don't get in."

DAD, derisively: "That's the spirit."

ISABELLA: "Everyone was saying, 'As long as we don't get into the Interschool we'll be happy'. And I was thinking, 'same with me!'"

DAD: "Oh, that's great. What kind of an attitude is that?"

ISABELLA: "And Gemma, she was the person who came last, said, 'as long as I don't get into the Interschool, I'm happy.'"

DAD: "I think she's safe. She came last."

ISABELLA: "Yeah. But, Dad. Why did you have to put me in?"

DAD: "But I didn't put you in. You came 15th."

ISABELLA: "Yeah, but you asked Miss Tennet to put me in if I tried."

DAD: "No, I didn't. She came up to me and said Isabella made the team because her time was good enough. That's all that mattered."

ISABELLA: "Oh, Dad. I can't do that cross-country ever again."

DAD: "Why?"

ISABELLA: "It just tires me out so much! Before [the race] I felt like I wanted to faint."

DAD: “Well, that’s because you’re not fit enough. You haven’t been doing enough runs around the block.”

ISABELLA: “No, it’s not because of that! It’s because the sun was so hot and I had to do all this running non-stop and I . . . oh, I just tire myself out! And then I tried to beat people because everyone was cheering.”

DAD: “That’s good, isn’t it? It lifted your spirits.”

ISABELLA: “No, it’s not. People would cheer and then it makes you sprint at the start. Because you want to be, like, ahead and everyone’s watching you go sprinting.”

DAD: “Well, isn’t that a good thing?”

ISABELLA: “Ah, no! Because then you sprint and start walking.”

DAD: “Well, you didn’t walk.”

ISABELLA: “That’s because I wasn’t dumb enough to sprint. I never want to do that cross-country ever again. Never again. Never again. Never again.”

DAD: “Alright, I do hear you.”

ISABELLA: “Well, I hope you did.”

DAD: “I’ve never seen anyone so unenthusiastic about making a team. A lot of kids would be excited about making a school cross-country team.”

ISABELLA, spluttering: “Who’d be excited? ‘Oh, yes. I’m so excited! I’m in the Interschool, which means I have to run another cross-country race. And everyone loves cross-country, don’t they?’ Everyone hates cross-country. If you like cross-country you’re, like, dumb.”

DAD: “Well, a lot of kids seemed to be liking it and were trying really hard.”
Isabella: “Only three people in my class liked it.”

DAD: “Really. Who were they?”

ISABELLA: “Taylor, Zoe and Madison.”

DAD: “There you go.”

ISABELLA: “Yes, well, they might like it but they come really bad places.”

DAD: “Okay.”

ISABELLA: “They like it because they walk half the way. I would like it if I could go slow. But I just couldn’t.”

DAD: “Why couldn’t you go slow?”

ISABELLA: “Because you told me to get a place. And you’d get angry with me if I didn’t.”

DAD: “I would not have got angry! That’s nonsense!”

ISABELLA: “I wish it was [only] the top ten. It should have been. It shouldn’t have been the top fifteen. That’s too much (sic) people!” I’ll give you one guess what place Isabella came. One guess.

POSTSCRIPT

Putting the ‘cross’ in cross country

Well, the big day arrived and went and that night Isabella, who came 81st in a field of around 120, slumped worn out into my arms.

ISABELLA: “I’m never coming 15th again! You get 15th and then they make you do another race.”

DAD: “Well, you only have yourself to blame, Issy. No one made you come 15th.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, but that wasn’t my fault. They usually take the top ten but this year they go and take right up to 15th. 16th was so lucky.”

There goes the neighbourhood

An old lady, as overheard by Holly, as she was walking past the spare block next door that the kids like to play in, and which currently has a shipping container on it storing what half the neighbourhood initially thought was a clandestine drug laboratory: “Oh, they shouldn’t be letting kids live in there. They should be living in a proper house.”

Saved by the bus

DAD, on the way to the bus stop this morning: “What are you learning about at the moment, Ams?”

AMELIE: “Um, Australia.”

DAD: “Australia?”

ISABELLA: “That’s why she’s been learning about Australian animals and stuff like that.”

DAD to Amelie: “Well, what do you know about Australia?”

AMELIE: “Well . . . it’s the biggest island, there’s seven states—”

ISABELLA, authoritatively: “No.”

AMELIE: “Yes, there is.”

ISABELLA: “No, no, no, but there’s seven, like, (starting to smile upon realising that what she was about to say probably wouldn’t withstand scrutiny) . . . continents?”

DAD: “No, not continents!”

AMELIE, enjoying a new-found confidence: “I said seven states.”

ISABELLA, noticing the bus coming, wisely chooses to say nothing and moves towards the bus.

HOLLY: “C’mon, Amelie. We have to go and catch the bus.”

DAD, as Holly and Amelie join Isabella in the

bus queue, calling out to Isabella: “I think there’s six states and two territories, isn’t there? Is that right?”

AMELIE: “Bye, Dad!”

DAD: “Issy, there’s six states and two territories, isn’t there?”

Too late. In the space of my few words, Isabella had already jumped on the bus and was looking for a seat. Amid the roar of the bus engine, there was no chance of my acknowledging how much nearer her little sister had gone to getting the fact right. And it was probably deliberate; Isabella was saved by the bus and knew she was.

The difference between teachers and the police

ISABELLA: “The difference between teachers and the police is that the police chase you. Teachers don’t chase; they just wait for you to come back to class.”

What to believe

DAD: “Even though we don’t have a TV, if you were watching a TV at a friend’s place, how would you know what to believe and what not to?”

ISABELLA: “It’s pretty simple, Dad. People that are fake you can see that they know their script off by heart and that they’re doing it fluently. But people who are telling the truth are, like, not that fast. They know what they’re saying and they don’t have to rush and everything.”

DAD: How does an ad look really fake to you?”

ISABELLA: “When they have people flying in it and they’re really happy. It just makes me think that that probably wouldn’t happen. Like, it’s too cheesy. Everything’s so perfect. Like, they have a perfect couch and everything.”

DAD: “Do you believe people in ads when they say they’re happy when they’ve bought

a product? Because sometimes in ads you see people – they’re holding some product – and you see them using it and quite often they’re happy afterwards. How can you tell if someone is really happy in an ad versus somebody who is just doing it because they are getting paid to do the ad? Are they always faking it?”

ISABELLA: “Mainly, yeah.”

DAD: “If Daniel Radcliffe was to do an ad, would you believe him?”

ISABELLA: “Probably not after Harry Potter.”

DAD: “Why?”

ISABELLA: “Only because Harry Potter is fake.”

DAD: “What about if Emma Watson was to do an ad for a product and she said it was something you could really believe in because she’s endorsing it? In other words, she’s saying it’s good. Would you believe her?”

ISABELLA: “Maybe, yeah.”

DAD: “A lot of advertisers try very hard to get celebrities to endorse their products. ‘Endorse’ meaning to support their products. And say they’re really good. Can you see why they would do that?”

ISABELLA: “Yeah. Because everyone’s going to go, ‘Oh, Katy Perry.’ And then they’ll say, ‘I know her!’ And then they’ll know who that is and they’ll think, ‘oh yeah, we’ve got to buy it, Katy Perry bought it.’”

DAD: “Do you think that would work on you?”

ISABELLA: “Maybe. It depends.”

DAD: “Hmm. What’s the best way then to know whether a product is good or not?”

ISABELLA: “By its ingredients.”

No comparison

Isabella cautiously allowed me to take her iPod to work so I could listen to some podcasts as I rode.

ISABELLA: “Promise you won’t get sweat on it?”

DAD: “Don’t worry, I’ll look after it.”

ISABELLA: “I love it so much!”

DAD: “I know you do, Issy.”

ISABELLA: “I love it more than Holly!”

LAST WORD

AMELIE, while riding past a pub: “There goes another one of those alcohol things.”