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George Through Seventh Grade

George was our first child, the one we had to practice and learn on. Fortunately, he was his own person, a lot of fun and a great pleasure. He managed to survive our "practicing" very well. I don't remember everything he did or said, but I do have many wonderful memories.

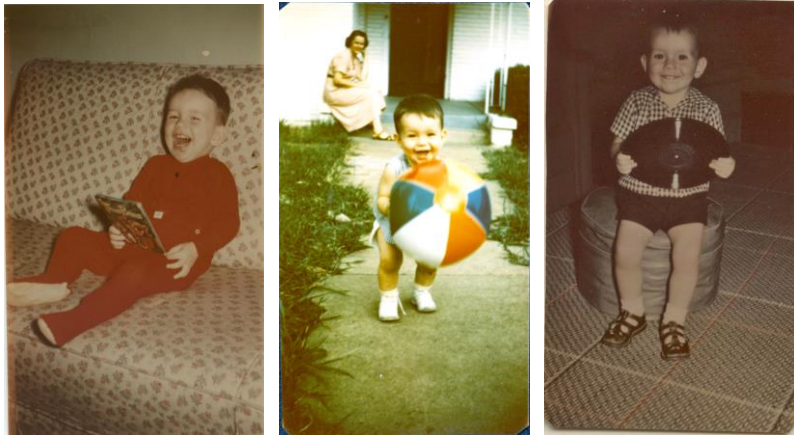
During our pre-George years, I had observed that babies often became attached to a blanket, even giving it a baby name that became part of the family vocabulary, so I looked for George to adopt his blanket. He never did. But he did become very much attached to a book. Needless to say, two teacher-parents were not at all displeased, even though it was a stiff, un-cuddly attachment. Moreover, it didn't get torn and dirty as I'd seen babies' blankets get, necessitating heroic measures to spirit it away for a cleaning; however, it did get lost occasionally.

We read to him even when he was tiny. By the time he was six months old or so, although he didn't talk yet, he made very clear to us that a Little Golden Book, one about trucks, was a very important aspect of his life. He wanted to go to sleep with it, after one of us had read it through two or three times, with proper exclamations over the fire truck, the pickup truck, the goose-neck trailer, and so on. He wanted the book with him most of the day -- around the house, in the car, at the store, just like a blanket. When it was misplaced for a short time, we had to abandon every activity until we found it. It occurred to me to invest in two or three copies -- after all they were only twenty-five cents each. The extras were kept well out of sight until he couldn't find his pal; then an identical substitute could appear. If he ever observed that the truck book could appear magically at the grandparents' house as well as at home, he didn't tell us. His devotion to his truck book continued until he was about four, when gradually he no longer needed its constant presence; instead, he wanted five or six of his favorite books in bed with him. Because they didn't seem to interfere with his sleep, we were happy to comply.



There were other ways that George didn't follow the pattern we had observed in other children. He didn't follow the "book" in turning from his back onto his stomach, for example. The pediatrician assured me that he wasn't handicapped and that he would turn over -- when he considered it worth his while. Sure enough, well after the time he should have been turning over, we found him in his crib standing up, a posture he couldn't have achieved without turning over. By the time he was eight months old, he was walking fairly well, but he'd never crawled. After he fell

several times, he stopped walking and became proficient at crawling. During this period, he delighted in sweeping books off the lower shelves of bookcases. We tried patiently to convince him that other games were better, but he didn't pay us much heed. Finally, one evening, we decided that life was too short to spend most of our time picking up books; one peaceful thing to would be to turn all the book shelves to the wall, and that was something George would be able to help with! For some reason, we didn't act on our resolution immediately. Next morning, George cheerfully bypassed all the book shelves and played with all those other games we had been advocating; we didn't have to turn the bookcases, after all. Obviously, he did return to walking pretty soon when crawling became too slow for him.



George's cousin Kathy was four months younger than he. They spent a great deal of time playing together. Before Kathy was a year old, she was talking -- volubly. George had a few words, but he put none of them together and seldom used any of them when he was with Kathy. We were beginning to worry about his development when he suddenly began speaking in sentences, sometimes long ones. We were forced to assume that he had thought about Kathy's fluency and decided not to speak until he could hold his own with her. Suddenly, their relationship developed into one based on long conversations. Even though Kathy moved with her family to Houston when she was about four and the two children didn't see so much of each other, they continued to be good, talkative friends. I've seen them -- rather heard them -- even after they were adults and separated by half a continent making up for several years' absence with long head-to-head, heart-to-heart conversations.

When he was four, George went to a small nursery school. He obviously enjoyed that school and, apparently, the idea of school. Consequently, we were shocked when he began objecting loudly to attending the kindergarten we had chosen for him. He did not object to being separated from me at any time except when the school was concerned. Over the objections of the kindergarten director and teachers, Paul and I decided something was too stressful about the school and so we took him out; he stayed at home. The next year he went happily off to attend the first grade. Several years later we passed the kindergarten building. He mentioned in an off-hand manner that he hadn't wanted to go there because David, the boy next door, had told him that he'd have to "pass tree climbing," an idea which terrified him at the time.

His first-grade experience was a delightful one. Martha McCall, a master teacher, had been

given the privilege of experimenting with a specially selected twenty students from the sixty or so entering Dan D. Rogers Elementary School that year. They all had high reading readiness scores. She was to give them an enriched curriculum but could not accelerate them beyond the stated goals of all other first grades. Before Christmas, the class was beginning to get frustrated because Martha could not begin the actual process of teaching them to read. One of several projects she had to keep their interest was to hatch an egg in a small incubator. They studied all about hen eggs. George enlightened us about the composition of an egg, especially telling us about the albumen as we ate breakfast, thereby upsetting his little brother. The class was listening to Miss McCall read E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* at the time and decided to give the chick the spider's name. Charlotte followed them wherever they went, even out on the playground at recess. George rushed home from school one day to tell us that Charlotte had crowed that day but they were not going to change his name. With the approach of the closing of school for the summer, students with parental permission participated in a drawing to see who would give Charlotte room and board for the summer. George didn't win, but later that summer he was reconciled when he heard that Charlotte had disappeared from his new home.

During first grade George was chosen to play the part of John Brown when the class sang the song "John Brown Had a Little Indian" during a talent show. He counted out the little Indians up to ten as they stepped out of line, then counted backward to one as they returned to the line. He was very proud of the tall hat that was his costume. He also won the smile contest during National Dental Week. The principal called me to tell me of his triumph, saying that she understood Miss McCall's "boy" had won. The meaning of her remark became clear when George said that he was puzzled that each person in the class had one vote, except him. And he had two.

The next year the school office called to ask me to come get George because some sand had blown into his eye on the playground and the nurse wasn't allowed to treat it. We had only one car at that time, and it was at SMU with Paul. I said that Paul would pick him up as soon as possible. There had recently been a kidnapping from one of the schools. When Paul appeared in the office, the secretary, who didn't know him, asked George to identify him. Because George was accustomed to that secretary being playful with him, he thought she was joking and refused to say who Paul was. Fortunately, she recognized the glint in George's eye and changed her question. "George," she asked, "is this your father?" "Yes," he replied, and all was well.

George became impatient that he wasn't allowed to study in the school band program until the fourth grade, when he could learn violin. We substituted private piano lessons which seemed to satisfy him for about a year. Then he was allowed to add violin lessons at school. One day his piano teacher called to say that she believed it was time for George to drop his piano lessons. For the last three lessons, he had gone cheerfully into her house, sitting down on the piano bench, putting his music on the rack, folding his hands, and refusing to play a note. I wasn't surprised although I was sorry he'd taken such a way to announce his displeasure, for he and I had been growling at each other about practice time. He did bring his violin home for practice on that, but he clearly was unhappy with the music he was able to produce. The next year he progressed from the violin to the clarinet, where he seemed content. He continued on the clarinet through high school band. From high school on he was devoted to the guitar and now plays part-time with a professional group in Dallas.

This by no means exhausts the anecdotes about George through the seventh grade. I guess it's just as well that I didn't keep that list of bright sayings and special occasions, even though it would no doubt be fun to have it to jog my memory.