

In Medias Res

Gossip (surprising fact)

Kyle Bredemeir only had one ear. All the kids on the bus had noticed it, and many seemed to think if he had just one ear, he couldn't hear very well. They made whispered comments about it.

"I heard he lost it in a combine accident," a pudgy male fourth grader said.

"No. That's not true," his seatmate enthusiastically countered. The Zillingers live just down the road from them, and Jeri Zillinger told me his sister Mary tore it off in a fight."

"You guys just shut up!" Kyle's sister Mary said, overhearing the gossip.

Fire (teasing statement followed by dialogue)

To a five-year-old, fire was the most fascinating thing in the world ... and forbidden.

"Never play with matches." My mother had burned the words in my mind but not on my heart.

IV Agony (Description followed by dialogue)

Trembling, arms outstretched, my four-year-old son braced once again for the painful piercing penetration of the IV needle.

"I'm scared, Daddy."

"I know, Son," I said, wiping a tear from his cheek.

A nurse stood to the side, IV tubing in one hand, needle in the other. I'd arrived just in time.

"I'm sorry to call you away from work," Melony said. "Mark wanted you."

Kindergarten (sustained dialogue)

"No pokes! No pokes!" he screamed hysterically.

“I'm sorry, Mark,” I said, “but you told me before we came that you knew you'd have to have several shots before you could enter kindergarten, remember?”

“Um-hm.”

“Then where do you want to sit on the table, on the chair, or on my lap?”

“NOOOO! No pokes! No pokes!” he wailed again. But that wasn't an option.

I'll Be Ninken; You Can Be My Last Name (sustained dialogue)

“Hey, Max, know what? I'll be Ninken and you can be my last name.” Both the humor and the insult eluded my three-year-old, but six-year-old Mark was busily laughing at his own wit.

“Where'd you hear that?” I asked.

“I just made it up.”

“Yeah, I suppose you did, but where did you hear the word ‘nincompoop’?”

“You said it.”

“I did?”

“Yeah, to the driver that turned in front of us at the mall.”

“God, Please Help my Daddy” (brief dialogue followed by teasing flashback)

“God, please help my daddy not to be so mean to me,” Mark prayed.

We'd just returned home from the mall ... for the second time in one night. The rain had been pouring down in buckets when we left the mall the first time, so I'd left my sons, Mark and Max, in the mall entrance while I walked the 30 feet in the rain to get the van.

“Here, hold these, Mark,” I said to my six-year-old as I opened the door and stepped into the rain. “They're important and I don't want to get them wet.”