

The I-Forgot Kid



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BEING PICKED

All day in class I couldn't sit still. I was so excited. I just couldn't wait to tell everyone. My teacher had picked ME! Out of all the class, I was the one selected to read a prayer at the big assembly. It would be the first time I'd ever stood up in front of the whole school – grades one through eight. For a first grader, that seemed pretty darn cool.

Was I scared? No. I was thrilled! I knew if I practiced really hard I would say my lines like a star. I would make my teacher and parents proud.

Just one short sentence – that's all I had to memorize, just two lines. I was going to say the sentence every day till I knew it forward and backward, there would be no chance of failure. My teacher believed in me, and I wanted to show her I was worthy, that she made the right choice.

LEARNING MY LINES

Every morning I said my lines. Before breakfast, after breakfast, in the car on the way to school. Every afternoon, I said them again. Before dinner, after dinner, then once more before bed for luck. My brother made sure I knew everyone was getting way sick of hearing my lines by now, but hey, this was an important job, I was not put off!

Counting down the days and counting my mistakes – Last two days, mistakes: none! Dad teased me that I would be saying the prayer in my sleep.



THE BIG DAY

Entering the school assembly, it looked just like I imagined, the huge familiar hall, the whole school there. But I wasn't scared. I enjoyed my time to shine.



I waited for my turn with the other two student speakers. The children came from different grades, one student from each school division picked, I'd been selected for the whole of lower primary.

After what seemed like an eternity, I followed the cue, stepped toward the principal who held out the microphone for me, and glanced out at the crowd.

GONE

Without notice, -ZAP- my head went totally blank.

Where were my lines? How, why, where?

It was so important to me, I knew what to say, but I didn't –

I was terrified, panic started to build up inside me.

Looking out and around me again, the audience staring back, my head felt like an empty scrapbook pages from art class.

– My mind became frantic, but nothing came.

The principal spoke to me, handed me the microphone, it was my time to speak. Yet, I had no words.

A rush of the last week's work flew through my mind, all the practice, the paper with the lines, the words, but they were just not there.

I had to say something – the microphone in front of me, the audience waiting, expecting....

The principal said my name again; patient but impatient all at once.

All I could stammer was “Um.....I forgot.”

The hall fell into silence.

Then uncomfortable stifled laughter.

Then I was ushered off stage.

It was over.

Sad was an understatement. I felt like a balloon with my air let out, a gummy squashed on the pavement. But even worse than disappointing myself – and the feeling I had disappointed my teacher and parents; the fear that everyone would laugh at me.

THEY DID...

And they did.

Mum and Dad knew I was pretty gutted, but it was all brushed off. I think to reduce my embarrassment. I don't think anyone knew what happened afterward, on the playground, or how badly the experience hit me. The effect would ripple increasingly outward in my heart.

For months and months, an eternity, older kids came up to me and laughed, usually the boys. Kids in my class didn't care, they understood, but the rest of the school thought it was cool to make jokes.

Yep, I was now the “I-Forgot” kid.



What the kids didn't understand is how deep it hurt.

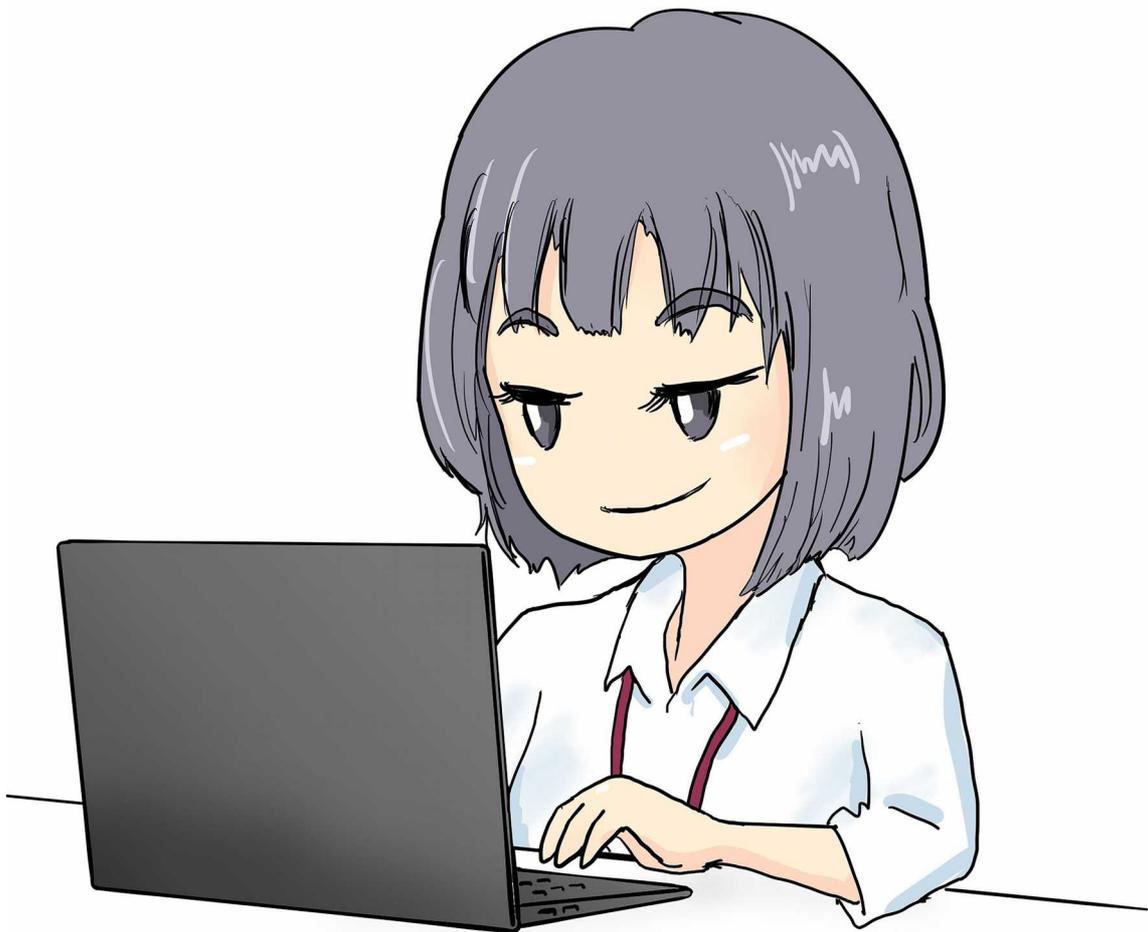
I never spoke again in public until I took a position as a counsellor to help kids stop bullying. Then one day I had to face my fear. I stood up in front of a group, to say my first words. The first words in front of a large group in twenty years. How could I teach these kids not to do the same thing to their classmates? How could I tell them not to judge, not to laugh, to care?

EPILOGUE

The child in this story grew up to be a champion on behalf of those bullied or hurt. Helping students realise it's so *not* okay to tease. Helping kids who faltered or failed get back on the horse and try again. Helping this one school be a better place, one where all students can thrive. Where no bullying was the way of life and bullies were ridiculed. And gradually the counsellor overcame the fear to speak with practice and the reward of students growth.

Can you make a difference in your school?

THE END



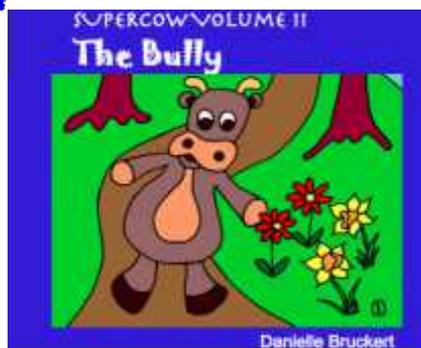
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