

A Day With Johnny

Written By: Ms. Neena Wahi/2018

One sunny afternoon twelve preschool children, two assistant teachers and I went out for a walk in the neighborhood. The preschool is located in the Middle Village, a residential neighborhood in the central section of Queens, New York City. The neighborhood is largely single-family homes with many attached houses and small apartment buildings.

That day, I had a boy named Johnny in my group. He always challenged me. If I told him not to do something he always wanted to know why, and I had to make up a reason for him to stop his bad behavior. That day he was kicking the trash cans, and the rest of the group was laughing and following him. I said, "Johnny, you are in the front. It is your duty to guide your group. Whatever you do your friends will follow. Be good, and others will do as you do."

I thought I did the right thing by asking him to behave responsibly. To my surprise he immediately replied, "Oh, I am a stupid leader."

For a minute, I was speechless. Johnny was a very intelligent and charming boy. He was being raised by a single parent, his father Mr. Woodworth, who was very caring. Mr. Woodworth dropped him off at preschool and picked him up at the end of the day. Every evening he would tell him, "Johnny, say thank you to your teacher for taking good care of you."

They both stood before me with big smiles. This was the time when I usually mentioned the good things Johnny did during the day, followed by any negative behavior which needed to be addressed. I knew his father loved him very much, but when some children came with both the parents I saw a little sadness in Johnny's eyes. His mother died of lung cancer when he was only two years old. No doubt he missed his mother. His father loved her so much he never thought of marrying again. Johnny had felt his mother's love for a very brief period. For this reason I had a soft spot for Johnny. He knew this, and that's why he loved to do silly things when he was with me.

I had been working at the preschool for two years, after arriving from India ten years earlier. I loved to work with young children because of their innocence. Sometimes they do silly things and as a teacher I have to correct them, especially when it comes to their safety.

Today when Johnny said he was a stupid leader I was surprised. It was more fun to kick the cans than to follow the rules. So I called rest of the group together and told them that we could not stay outside and kick the trash cans, but we could go back to the playground and have fun. So we all came back to the playground and I gave them balls to kick and saved the day.

