



I don't attend many of Nicholas' school day functions. I was able to attend a special one in second grade. The second grade classes in the school were all practicing plays in which the students would have to get up in front of about 40 kids and 20 parents and read their lines from a play.

The plays were silly knock-offs from traditional fairy tales. Instead of the story of the squirrel that hid nuts for winter while other animals watched, only to teach the lesson of procrastination – there was a story of a lazy dog, a lazy cat, and a lazy mouse that didn't want to make a banana split, but wanted to share in the treat when it was done.

No costumes to hide behind. No music to talk over. Just 6 kids. 6 Chairs in the front of the room. 40 kids watching. 20 parents watching. And Nicholas. My Nicholas.

10 minutes earlier I had arrived to find an empty classroom. The kids were out on the playground. Since I normally don't arrive at this time of day (mid morning), I didn't know the morning routine. I wandered around a little, but not much. I didn't dare miss the play. A few minutes later, the class returned, with Nicholas in the rear – unusual for him. He always wanted to be first. Then I found out why.

“I don't want to be a lazy dog,” cried Nicholas. He had gotten hurt on the playground and the teacher was helping him back to the room. He had only skinned his leg, but it was traumatic for him. Ever since he was a newborn, he was never comfortable in his own skin. He was sensory challenged from the beginning and we learned over time how to identify and work with Nicholas to transition him to another topic.

“I don't want to be a lazy dog,” he said again. I motioned to the teacher that I would take him to his seat and work with him, so she and the intern could get the other 23 kids ready for the play. Nicholas as crying. Nobody looked at him. Either it was typical for him and they got used to it, or they were all distracted by the upcoming play.

“I don't want to be a lazy dog,” he kept repeating. You see, for Nicholas, when something was important, then repetition was a method to ensure that he was being heard. “I know you don't,” I said. But your classmates are counting on you, you don't want to miss it do you? As soon as I'd said it, I knew it was the wrong thing to say. You generally had one chance to get it right; otherwise it was going take 5 minutes to get back to where you just left.

“I don't want to be a lazy dog,” he screamed. I should have learned that he doesn't respond to peer pressure, ego strokes, or anything that would normally start to re-direct a “typical child”. He responds to different things at different times. I would have to do better to guess. “Daddy came to see you in the play. I would really like to see the lazy dog.”



“I don’t want to be a lazy dog,” was drowned out by the teacher telling the children to get in line by the door in their teams for the play. There were four teams of 6 kids. I would see 4 plays from this class, and 4 from another class. Nicholas was now distraught that his group didn’t get to line up first, he wanted to be first. This was a step in the right direction. He was focused onto something else. Focused away from the injury. Focused away from the lazy dog. He was now focused on not being first. Something that has haunted him for 7 years. But, he transitioned to a different topic. Now I knew I could win, it was just a matter of whether he would calm down before we entered the room of 40 kids and 20 parents or after. We wandered over into line, the end of the line.

“I wanted to be first, “became the new chant. His teammates were now looking at him. They wanted to help, but you could tell that they didn’t know how. You could tell they felt it would be all right. None of them looked concerned about Nicholas, just helpless; they didn’t know how to help. I knew the feeling well. Nicholas had been in the class 6 weeks. I’d been his dad 7 years and sometimes I couldn’t figure out how to help.

“I wanted to be first”, was echoed. I asked one of Nicholas’ teammates, what her role was going to be in the play. “I’m the Lazy Cat” was the answer. “What do you get to do?” I asked her. Nicholas told me the answer, “She gets to be lazy with me.” Now I knew I had him. He was back on the story. Back in line. Back with his friends. Back into the play. “You both get to be lazy?” I asked in wonder. “Yes” was the chorus of response.

“Let’s go boys and girls; it’s time to do our plays.” And with that, we marched off next door to pile 60 people into a classroom designed for 24 kids. I was right behind Nicholas the whole way. He knew I was there and that helped. He sat with his class, about 10 feet from me. He would look over his shoulder and make sure I was there. I would wave back so he knew.

Five minutes later, the show started. Of the 8 plays, Nicholas sat there staring into space for the first 3 or 4 plays. Clapping when they finished, but staring. Then he started to pull himself together totally. His team was called 6th. He walked up with the other 5 boys and girls and sat on the stools. And then it happened. He transformed into looking just like the rest of the kids.

He read his lines. He said his words. Some were loud. Some were soft. But always he read every word. He waited his turn and he laughed at the funny lines. He turned on his personality for the show, then stood and accepted the applause with his friends. He sat down and watched the last 2 stories with the rest of the participants in the room.

When the all the plays were completed, all the kids headed back to their classrooms. Nicholas got in his class line and I waved goodbye. He waved back and marched back to class. I left that day believing several things about Nicholas. First, he reminded me that he has issues that other children don’t have. Second, he proved to me that he could overcome them when he wants to and when he is channeled properly.