

Teaching Is Probably Not My Forte

Another tangents.org blogger, who is also a very good friend of mine, blogs about his (mis)adventures concerning substitute teaching. He has posted a poll or two about what subjects and ages his readers would like to teach if they could choose. I never really took the questions seriously since I could never picture myself in the situation to teach. After all, you need a degree to teach most anything these days, and I stopped college short of a degree to get married, which is one of the best decisions I ever made, no regrets. So I would answer those polls, and I would say I'd like to teach zoology or animal behavior or something like that because I love animals. And I guessed that I would like to teach kids younger than high school, because I was a kid once, and I remember how older kids treat their substitute teachers... But again, until a few weeks ago, I never thought I'd find myself in a position to actually teach a class...

At our family's church, childcare is provided. Over the summer, understandably there are many childcare volunteers who need a break, so they ask parents to volunteer. My husband and I quickly signed up – after all, we have 4 kids in childcare there every week, so it was time to give back. We didn't state an age nor gender preference of our students; we just noted that we didn't want to be in the 4-year-old nor 2-year-old classes since that's where our two daughters are who would have a chance of being clingy with Mom and Dad volunteering in their class. Basically, it was the luck of the draw – and our “luck” dictated that we were to be in the 3rd-5th grade boys class. Ok, no problem. I've seen the tail-end of those Brownies meetings while waiting to pick up my daughter – 9 or 10 tween girls running around; screaming, giggling, gossiping, sometimes somehow doing all 3 of those

things at once... So um, no thanks, boys will be just fine for Sunday school. So I thought...

We got our "lesson plans", and there were not fewer than 10 pages of instructions to follow for our 1 hour and 5 minute class. Well, add-in the arrival games and we were in charge for about an hour and 15 minutes. But I haven't seen time crawl by that slowly since before I had kids; it was the longest hour I've had in a long time! Not that I wasn't having fun, because I was – A LOT of fun, actually. So anyway, all week, my husband and I have been poring over these lesson plans; I was committed to go in there today knowing exactly what I was doing and determined to keep control over those boys.

So we arrive, and the helpful leader tells us to grab snacks for the kids ahead of their arrival, but we don't know how many we'll be expecting, so in her words, "10 should be plenty". We get to the classroom, she explains a few things, and kids begin to arrive. From the beginning, it was clear we were going to have to keep one eye on a rambunctious and mischievous (though intelligent) little boy named Avery. In fact, the very minute after I made a mental note to watch Avery very closely, I looked up and he was *gone*. I had no choice but to leave my poor defenseless husband in the clutches of the growing number of 8-10 year-old-boys while I literally **ran** after the wayward Avery. The Kid's Kingdom building of our church is still somewhat of a maze to me, so it was pure luck that I got out into the hallway just in time to see the back of Avery disappearing through a set of double doors. "I've got you now, sucker" I thought as I ran through the gym after him. I chased him right up to the kids' check-in desk, where I, the newbie, had to explain to the staff person why I was chasing a kid who had escaped from my classroom. Luckily for me, she seemed to know Avery and to be familiar with his escapades, and she was grateful that I had chased him down. Turns out, he had decided to get himself a

name tag (which he is supposed to do *before* class but evidently did not), so he decided to leave the classroom to do so without telling anyone, which of course is a big no-no.

So I collar Avery, and we return to the classroom, and there are now kids everywhere who all had apparently arrived during the chase scene! There was one teeny-tiny little girl who stuck out like a sore thumb in a room full of all boys years older than her, so I went over to her and offered to walk her to the girls' class – and that's how I found out that she was a guest of one of the kids in the class, who turned out to be one of the pastor's sons. Actually, he was the son of the pastor who was our friend before we chose this church, so seeing him was a bit of a relief – for that moment anyway. I thought for sure he would be a nice, helpful boy... but more on that later. We did a head count, and we discovered in our classroom, we had 14 boys + 1 little girl + 2 freshman teachers with 0 experience = fun times ahead!

We played the activity that was slated for play while the kids were arriving, and it was a worksheet where the kids matched words with the fears they represent, like arachnophobia=the fear of spiders, felinaphobia=the fear of cats, etc. It went pretty well, despite disappearing pens (one guess – yes, Avery. Though I countered his pen trick well. When he said that he **ate** the pens, I said, well, you won't be needing snack then, and the pens were automatically recovered). Finally it was time to line up to go to large group.

Once in the large group room, also known as The Wherehouse, our responsibilities diminished as the leader took over and we relished a break of sorts. We got to see a few of the kids act things out, which was neat, and we also got to see our oldest daughter who had come over from her class. Let me tell you, she was a pro at their songs and dances! She just performed them without even giving a glance over to Mom and Dad, which is so the way we wanted it and exactly what we were afraid of when declining to volunteer in any of our kids'

classrooms. But her section of the room was also eerily quiet, and I kind of regretted the decision to stay away from teaching our kids' classrooms as I envied their parent volunteer with her *four* quiet girls versus our *fourteen* borderline obnoxious boys (and one little girl). Large group was uneventful, crisis-wise anyway. I tried some of the dances and my husband made fun of me... but the kids don't want to see some grumpy-looking adult standing there, not having fun, right? My job was to encourage them to participate, and I figured step one would be to participate myself!

So at 11:30, after Large Group, it was time to go back to the classrooms until 12:05. And that's when time began to creep in a way it hasn't for us since our engagement. We began class with one of the suggested games; a relay race involving cups of water. The instructions said it was "great for boys", so without really giving it thought, we learned the rules of that game and one other. The relay involved carrying a cup of water on the back of one's hand down a "balance beam" (tape line on the floor) and back again. This was fun, but as you can imagine, there were more than a few spills. And a note: Avery chose to get himself kicked out of this one – kudos to my husband for putting his foot down! Of course, by then all the boys were getting really rowdy (the pastor's son was one of the tricksters; here I thought he'd be a big help), so we shut the door and passed out the snack. But if you remember, earlier I said that we had only brought 10 snacks to the classroom, which "should be plenty" but alas, were not nearly enough for 15 hungry kids. Luckily, there were other snacks leftover from the previous session, and we didn't bother letting them choose which of the two snacks they would get, so snack time was very peaceful thanks to my husband's brilliant "you-get-what-you-get" snack tactic. I maintain from my many observations of kids that the #1 cause of **all** kid meltdowns is lack of food. That is free advice ☐

So then we sat at the table in the classroom, and it was time

for a coin tossing game. Everyone got a partner (including me – a well-behaved boy named Brandon, thank goodness), chose a side and each team flipped the coin – the person whose side was flipped answered the first question (something relating to the verse lesson and what was shown in the play during large group). The game continued with asking questions of each partner, and the kids began to have some fun with it and come up with silly answers. It was a fun game, but we finished and there were still at least 10 minutes until dismissal! Again, my husband saved the day, and rather than trying to look over the instructions for another game and potentially losing control of the classroom while we did that, he made up an activity, so we went around the table discussing our fears. And I've complimented him enough so far because he did an awesome job with the kids, but here's where it gets ugly – my husband chose this moment to share my fear of frogs with 14 little boys. If I were a regular teacher, I would be terrified and would probably move from my house and my hometown. But as a one-time substitute Sunday school teacher, I think I'm safe from any horrid pranks involving amphibians. So back to the game, according to their creativity, one boy's fear was of "cinderblocks", while a few of the students answered honestly that they were afraid of the dark. Quickly looking for our lesson plans to determine the next activity, we found them to be missing... "Avery" we said simultaneously, and like magic, there were the lesson plans, right in front of Avery's chair. But it was finally almost time to line up at the door for dismissal, and again, Hubby saved the day with another game – this one killed two birds with one stone by producing quiet AND spending time. The boys had to be quiet while my husband counted to 20 or else he would start over. We only had to reset twice, believe it or not! Once for (who else) Avery, and once for two other boys wrestling each other to the floor. And then it was over.

And then we got our beautiful oldest daughter back, and she is so good and obedient. And our other three, they were happy to

see us as well, and us them, and things were going great until we pulled out of the parking lot and our 5-year-old noticed her older sister's new ring she had earned at church... and so began the fighting. And the making up. And the familial bonding which involves a beautiful process that also makes me want to tear my hair out at times.

I am looking forward to volunteering in Kid's Kingdom again. But maybe next time, changing diapers for an hour would be easier!