

# Be Careful

By Mr. Knight

Psssst, Ya over here. Hello. Don't tell my parents I am talking to you. My parents get upset when I talk to strangers. I always tell them that they are not strange to me; they thought that was funny the FIRST time.

Some of my best friends are strangers. Almost all the strangers who are my friends are actually nicer than my non-stranger friends. Saqib is the nicest for sure. He drives the bus that I take to get to school. Three times I have lost my token to get on the bus and he has let me get on the bus anyway. He is not supposed to you know, but his niceness makes him break the rules. I have known him for two years now. I always sit at the front of the bus so I can talk with him. Sometimes he has to tell me that we have arrived at my bus stop because I have "gotten lost in the conversation" (my parents say I do this sometimes).

Oh, oh ya, Ms. Achong, she is the nicest too. She lives across from my school and she likes me because I always bring her dog back to her when it escapes from her house when she goes to get the mail. She is so nice. Sometimes I sit on her porch when I am waiting for the bus and she almost always gives me cookies. Most often she does most of the talking and it is always so interesting. Everyday she does or sees something cool. Yesterday she found an apple tree on someone's lawn and after asking the owner if she could try one of their apples, they told her she could take as many as she wanted. She made three apple pies and is giving one to the apple tree owners tomorrow. I had a piece. They are going to be very happy.

It is not just strangers that scare my parents but almost anything that I like. Skate boarding off a curb, scary. Climbing a tree beyond the reach of a parent, scary. Eating snow, disgusting – and I know what yellow snow is. Even going **too** fast on my toboggan! You are supposed to go fast, that's why you are going downhill! And anything to do with water – running in it, falling in it, swimming in it or drinking it – all dangerous.

All parents are scardey cats. And when they are together they are even worse. When one parent forgets to say, "Be careful", another says it for him.

Be careful of the goose poo! (Goose poo is the same colour as the grass. I don't have time to figure out which is which.)

Be careful with your sister! (But dad gives us piggybacks all the time and I am three times closer to the ground.)

Be careful where you throw the ball! (Throwing rocks I can understand – after that incident with my brother, I understand. But it is a ball. You throw balls at people. That is what playing catch is.)

Just be careful. (I am just leaving the house.)

Oh ya! Not all parents are scardey cats. Jaycee's mom is not afraid of anything. I love when I see Jaycee at the park with her mom. My parents might suck in some air and scrunch up their face (I call this their "fear face") but they say "Be careful" far less around Lorraine. I think Lorraine is so fearless because her job is delivering the mail door to door. She talks to everyone and is friends with the biggest dogs. Last week she even told Jaycee to try and see if she could hang by one arm off one of the jungle gym bars and did not stop her when she chose the high one in the middle of the bar bridge. I

tried it too and when I twirled around toward my mom her face told me she was not breathing. I must have hung on for 5 seconds straight - it was GREAT!!!

Tomorrow is going to be the BEST because Jaycee's mom invited me and my mom over to her house so Jaycee and I can play. My mom held her breath a bit before saying yes, but all that matters is she said YES!!!

When I woke up Saturday morning, early, I tried to be as normal as possible. I did everything the safe way so my mom would not have any excuse to keep me from playing with Jaycee.

My parents were sleeping when I woke so they would never have known if I made toast, but I took no chances and ate my cereal out of the box without milk. (My parents do not think milk is dangerous; they are 'fraidey cats NOT CRAZY but at times the way I carry the bowl of cereal does worry them – and yes I use two hands. When my parents came downstairs I was reading a book. I was actually drawing pictures of superman throwing a boulder on a robber when they woke but reading is even safer so I quickly switched to the book.

Once I got into the car, I rushed to put on my seatbelt before my mom told me but she is fast, very fast. But on the ride over I was able to list all the safe play things I could think of that Jaycee and I could do. I knew my mom would ask. She always asks what I think I will do with my friends when I go over to play. I knew she liked hearing things like play with dolls instead of break pond ice with rocks or build a space world with blocks instead of tri-cycle bumper cars.

"I think Jaycee and I will just play with her Smiley Suzies and draw storybooks and build forts out of pillows and talk and pretend to be teacher or student and read about dinosaurs and drink milk from plastic cups."

My mom reminded me that we would only be there for a few hours.

I was not lying to my mom. We could do any of those things; ok maybe not the Smiley Suzies but everything else. But we also could be visiting the baby birds in the tree in her backyard. We most likely were visiting the baby birds in her backyard.

"Hello Ms. Brasaud. Jaycee!!!".

"Can we play outside mom?!" Jaycee blurted before I could give her a hug. "Sure Jaycee but you have to stay in the backyard."

Jaycee is the best!!!

"Is that ok mom?" I asked and at the same time thought - smile but not too big of a smile.

My mom knew their backyard very well. It was just one big piece of grassy lawn with a fence that always was full of balls and big plastic toys and one oak tree that was impossible to climb... impossible to climb if started right at the bottom of the tree. Nothing to be careful of back there.

A smile relaxed her face. "Sure honey. Enjoy" she said as she moved toward a comfy chair.

Once outside, Jaycee whispered loudly, "I heard her chirp again this morning from my bedroom. It was her because her mom was not there."

"Did you see her?" I asked quietly and held my breath. Jaycee said she had not and I let out my breath slowly.

"I was going to ask my mom if she could see it because she has taller eyes but I wanted you to be the first friend I told."

That was when we gave each other our first hug of the day. When we let go we both knew we were no longer just friends, we were mountain climbers who just so happened to be friends.

Jaycee went to the far end of the yard and I looked around the back of the house for our climbing tools. When I arrived at the tree she had her brother's bike, an empty pot and some string she said was just wrapped around some tomatoes. I had found two plastic lawn chairs.

First, we tried one lawn chair on another but they either fell in onto each other when we put them the right way up or fell down when we put them upside down even when we leaned them against the fence. We put the pot on the chair but the pot was too short. The closest we got to the top of the fence was when we put the bike on the chair and the pot on the bike seat. I had climbed to the bar on the bike with one knee on the pot but as the pot wobbled under my knee I had to tell Jaycee that this "rock" was not the best to use on the way to the mountain summit.

"Hey, I think my mom has a ladder." said Jaycee. My stomach tightened. I knew my mom would not let me go up a ladder and I needed to be the first to see the baby bird. My eyes bounced to everything in the yard.

"What is that?" I asked. Jaycee said it was a Yogurt Ball. Her mom brought it home from her Yogurt class.

"What does yogurt have to do..." I shook my head and just went over to the ball. It was huge, about half the size of me, and when you pressed down on it sort of sunk down and became like a box – a squishy box.

I rolled it over and put it on top of one of the chairs.

Why had we not played with this toy before I mean it's a giant soft ball!!! Who doesn't like big soft balls?

I pushed it hard and it stuck right in the seat between the chair's arms. I then took the other chair and stood it on top.

When I was on top of the ball Jaycee went on her tiptoe and passed me the pot. With the pot in one hand, I held the top of the fence with the other.

I took a deep breath, put the pot on the ball, one foot on the pot, two hands on the top of the fence, eyes on the summit...

I MADE IT!!! I was so excited to be standing on the top that I almost "Whoo Hoooo-ed". Instead, I just looked down at Jaycee and smiled a full teeth smile and pointed both my thumbs into the air.

"Can you reach the branch?" asked Jaycee.

I had almost forgot about the bird.

I put out my arms like a T, like they teach you, and used my concentration to walk along the top of the fence to get to the tree trunk.

The branch was now sitting at my chest. I knew I could get up on it; I just needed to make sure I did not use my mind right now or I might think it was not possible.

The branch was sort of right over the top of the fence but it was also sort of right over the ground which was a lot further down.

Jaycee said I should just grab the branch and then pull my knee up on top of it. Grabbing the branch was easy. But putting my knee on the branch made me look down and that made that part harder.

It took three tries in my mind before my leg moved and when it did my arms did not like the idea and stopped working so well, making me skin my knee. All part of being a climber, I thought as I stood on the branch.

“Where is it?” I asked Jaycee.

Jaycee pointed and said it was two branches higher and to the left. I got to the next two branches quickly. Looking up instead of down was the right thing to do.

I stood next to the tree and looked to the very end. There was the nest. There was the baby bird’s head! The branch was thicker than it looked from the bottom of the tree but it was also longer.

“Now what?”

Jaycee was quick to say lie down on the branch and pull myself along on my stomach. She was more right than wrong but at that moment I moved closer rather than further from the tree.

“It is not that far” she said.

She was mostly right. It was not that far but it was not close so I tried to grab the branch above me so I could use it to balance a walk along the other branch. It was too high above me to reach.

I knelt down to see if my body would let me hug the tree branch. It did. It did not seem interested in letting me move, though.

My body and I had a talk. It said yes to moving one foot. At one foot, we both thought that moving further might not be a good idea. But I could see that the nest was only one foot away. We thought we could do one foot more.

The nest turned out to be more than a foot away. Both me and my body were not happy. But we were soooooo close now.

It is right there, I told myself. My body knew I was right this time but that did not make it any easier.

I think my body chose going forward because it was closer than the trunk of the tree.

Baby birds don’t really chirp. At least when a person’s face is very close to theirs they do not chirp. It sounds more like a scream than a chirp. My mom said that I was lucky that baby bird’s mother could not hear her screams or it would have come and pecked out my eyes. But we can talk about that later. She did not tell me that until I fall from the tree and that is later too. Right now I am so very excited to be looking right into the face of the baby bird. It is very ugly close up.

“What does it look like? Help me up so I can see.” Jaycee says.

“It is beautiful.” I say. I am not lying. It looks less ugly now. “But it is very loud. It won’t close its mouth.”

I look around at its nest. “The nest is very small”. How does it live in such a small space and where does her mom sleep?

“Let me see.” Jaycee says.

“Ok” I say. But as I do I look down. I hug the tree branch very close. Very close.

“Hurry up and let me see.”

I hear Jaycee and I want her to see the bird – it is so cool - but at that moment I think, “I am not moving.”

“I can’t move.”

“It is ok just do what you did before but backwards,” I think.

Backwards is pretty much the same as forwards in many situations. But in some situations like hanging on a branch, it is not the same. It is the opposite of the same. Once I think what I think, I think I am stuck. When I think I am stuck, I think I am scared. I am scared.

“What are you doing?” Jaycee asks. “You got your turn. It’s my turn now.”

“Get my mom!!!” I think but do not say. Partly because I am scared and fear is holding back my voice. I mostly do not say this because I do not want to get in trouble. And I even more mostly do not say this because my mother is right this time – not being careful was exactly what got me here.

“Are you ok?” Jaycee says?

“I can’t move” I blurt out quickly so my voice does not make me lose my balance.

“Just move backwards.”

I look over my shoulder to see if the tree is closer than before but somehow it has moved further away.

“Do you want me to get the ladder from my mother?”

“No!!!” My body tightened further around the branch in disagreement with what I said.

“What do you want me to do then?”

That was a very good question. It took a bit longer to answer this one.

“Bring the pot over and stand on top off it. Maybe if I hang from the tree you can grab me.”

Jaycee put the pot under me and stepped on top of it. She was still far down. I started to look over my shoulder I began to slip to the left. I think my mom calls that a sign.

“I am going to bring my feet down. See if you can touch them.”

I look over at the bird one more time. I do not think I will be seeing it up close again for a while. The bird is quiet so I say “Goodbye, bird”. This time it chirps. I think about staying but all the hugging has made the branch start hurting my stomach.

I let my left leg dangle into the air as I wrap the right tightly around the branch.

“That was not so bad” I think.

I move my left armpit over the branch. Things started to happen a bit faster and I start to slide.

With my legs dangling and my chest and arms and armpits holding onto the branch, I ask Jaycee if she can reach my feet.

“Not yet.”

I wiggle a little more each time pausing to ask if she can reach me.

“You need to have your body off the branch.”

I think of the story Ms. Nuri read our grade 1 class about the little bird who couldn’t fly because he was too scared to jump out off the branch.

“I would not be scared to jump off the branch if I had wings.” I thought.

With my armpits holding the branch I could feel Jaycee brush the bottom of my shoe with her fingers.

With that touch, I knew that if I hung off the branch with my hands she would be able to grab me.

I let myself slide down and hang from the branch by my hands.

Jaycee grabbed my ankles. “Now what do I do?” She asked.

Jaycee asked good questions.

“Get the yogurt ball!!!”

“Why?”

“Quick!!!”

At that moment, the ball was like a trampoline to me.

“Ok, it is right below you”

I looked down and thought if I hit in the middle it would flatten out like a trampoline. My mother later reminded me that I am very optimistic girl. I do not think she thinks that is always good.

“What are you doing, Thi??!!! (I am Thi and that was my mother). If I could have hung on right then I would have but as my hands were already loosening.

I did not hit the ball right in the middle but I was close. I guess I hit it more on the back of the ball because that is the direction I went – toward my mother. I flew really high. Not high enough for my mother to catch me but I think it was almost that high. I know that because I saw my mom’s face as I looped backwards before I slapped down on my back.

I also guess I was pretty high because I could see very clearly that my mom had the “no breathing” face. I too had the “no breathing” face but that was because the ground hit it out of me. A few seconds later my mother was kneeling over me asking me if I was alright.

I was able to bring down my smile before she arrived.

I knew exactly how I wanted to play with the yogurt ball the next time I visited Jaycee.