

## Be Careful What You Ask A Child!

Several weeks ago I was sitting in an outdoor ice cream parlor with Ruth and our miniature wire-haired dachshund, Orville, enjoying a dish of ice cream. Orville loves ice cream and we take him to outdoor restaurants, if he is welcome! A small boy, about five or six, became very interested in Orville and wandered over to our table to ask about him.

The parents were sitting nearby and seemed to enjoy watching their son pet and talk to Orville. After a few minutes the small boy said, "What's his name?" We told him it was Orville. He said that was a "funny" name and we all laughed. I said to the little boy, "What's your name?" The little boy looked at his mother and she stood up and said, "We have taught him not to tell anyone his name...a safety thing you know." We said "fine," the conversation seemed strained and we all went on our way.

I felt sorry that it has come to that with small children. I understand the concerns of some folks, but I think maybe those parents have gone too far. I say, "Don't ask my dog's name if you won't tell me your human name!" I'm sure children should not be giving out their addresses to strangers, but I can't understand not sharing one's name with an elderly couple (Ruth will hate this comment) whom you have engaged without their permission. I went on and on about this family's bad manners in the car and finally Ruth said, "You still haven't learned after all these years!" She was referring to something that had happened to me years and years ago...that could have got me into trouble!

I had recently been promoted (1980) at the College of Medicine and had lots of new administrative responsibilities. I found that I could end each day at the university library, or local public library, to read the afternoon mail and dictate letters and minutes of meetings and appointments. I had recently purchased the smallest dictating machine on the market. It was about the size of a pack of cigarettes and used small tape cartridges. I loved it and lots of folks commented on its compact nature and clear sound.

One day, about 5:00 PM, I was in the local public library using my dictating machine. That day, like most others, I picked a seat in the corner of the reference room so as not to bother other library users. I had just dictated several letters when a young boy about six or seven approached me and asked what I was doing. I told him and played a few seconds so he could hear my voice which had been recorded a few moments earlier.

He asked if he could try the machine and I said sure. He said, "What should I say?" I said, "Say anything you would like to say and we will play it back." He said his name and I played it back for him. He asked if he could try it again and I said sure. He then said his name and address. We played it back for him several times, he thanked me for showing him how to use the machine and departed. I erased his comments and went back to work.

About twenty minutes later, my young friend and his mother appeared by my side. The mother seemed very angry and

said, "Why are you having my son say his name and address into your tape recorder?" I explained that he had asked what I was doing and I explained I used the dictating machine to give instructions to my secretary. She said, "Give me that recorder." I said I would not that, but I would be willing to play the tape for her so she could hear that her son's voice was no longer on it. She was undeterred and insisted that I give her the dictating machine. I said I would not be willing to do that and she said I would be hearing more from her!

I didn't imagine I could get in trouble for what had happened and continued working on my mail. About 6:15, I left the library to meet Ruth across the street at Friendly's Restaurant at 6:30. Since I had parked in the library parking lot, I drove across the street and after parking at the restaurant, started reading the newspaper as I was fifteen minutes early. Several minutes later, I heard a noise in front of my car and peered over the top of my paper to see what was happening.

Low and behold, it was the angry mother and her son standing in front of my car talking. She saw me look over the top of my paper, grabbed her son, pulled him into the car and drove out of the parking lot in a hurry. I assumed she thought I was stalking them and was very worried. I headed into the restaurant and waited for the police...who never came. Ruth laughed at my story and said to not be so friendly. She reminded me that since I was the local Rotary president that year that the mother could find my name and picture in the newspaper several times each month...and

that I wouldn't be hard to find. Every time my picture appeared in the newspaper, Ruth would say, "That mother will probably get you this time!"

I doubt that "that mother" ever reported me to the police. I have never asked another little boy I didn't know to tell me his name...at least not until that little kid asked Orville's name. Never again! I will never ask any child to tell me their name unless they ask me my name...or that of my dog.

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