

From THE NEXT STOP by Glen Finland

This is an excerpt from a book about a family with an autistic son.

Whether two hours or two months had passed since he'd seen someone last, my string-bean son would walk in and out of a room without offering a hello or good-bye. There was no aforethought or intentional rudeness to it; it was simply his way.

"David," Bruce would say, tapping the cushion beside him, "come sit down and tell me what you did today." David would walk around the edge of the room without answering him, then slink away like a cat. Bruce usually shrugged it off. But year after year, a person has to work hard not to let that sort of thing get him down.

A few weeks after our dog, Sophie died, Bruce took David to see the film, *My Dog Skip*, a ten-tissue weeper where an only child loses his beloved dog to the ravages of old age. The setup was the boy had been sort of a loner and really counted on his dog for companionship for most of his life. When the houselights came up, many moviegoers stayed in their seats, blowing their noses and taking the time to set their faces straight. David stared ahead as the credits rolled with no trace of emotion, no outward sign of a connection to the movie-boy's loss.

Outside the theater, rain pelted the sidewalk. Bruce pointed David toward the parking lot and they raced through the street, water gushing along the curb and over the tops of their shoes. Chilled and wet, Bruce sat behind the wheel of the car, soaking in the expression on his son's face—walled off, unreachable. Neither of them able to bridge the abyss between them.

The thought triggered a little shudder in Bruce's shoulders and, aching for what he realized would never be there in his son's psyche, he broke down. He crumpled over the steering wheel and couldn't stop crying, not sure which of them he was grieving more for. Because it wasn't only a good dog that would be missing from David's life, but the need to hold a hand, to desperately want a lover's kiss, and to someday comfort his own child in his arms. All the things in the sphere of love and affection that mark us as human in our daily lives. Pressing his forehead hard against the wheel, Bruce wept in great heaving sobs that wracked his whole body and left his hands full of rain and snot and tears.

David stared across the empty parking lot, waiting out the storm.

QUESTIONS:

1. Who are the characters and how are they related?
2. Who is Sophie? What had happened to her recently?
3. The main issue here is David's lack of _____.
4. What was David's emotional reaction to the movie?
5. Why did David's reaction bother Bruce so much?
6. Why did Bruce cry when they got to the car?
7. What are the things that would always be missing from David's life according to his dad?
8. Have you ever known a family dealing with autism or another disability? What kinds of problems did they face?
9. List some adjectives that explain how you felt when you read this passage.

From Robert Fulghum's book, ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN

"These are the things I learned (in Kindergarten):

1. Share everything.
2. Play fair.
3. Don't hit people.
4. Put things back where you found them.
5. CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS.
6. Don't take things that aren't yours.
7. Say you're SORRY when you HURT somebody.
8. Wash your hands before you eat.
9. Flush.
10. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.
11. Live a balanced life - learn some and drink some and draw some and paint some and sing and dance and play and work everyday some.
12. Take a nap every afternoon.
13. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.
14. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
15. Goldfish and hamster and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we.
16. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first WORD you learned - the biggest word of all - LOOK."

—Work with a partner. Decide which of the items are most important. Cut the list down to three items.

Read and discuss these quotes and tell what they mean. Teachers explain who these people are.

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it—always.

Mahatma Gandhi

Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.

Winston Churchill

It's paradoxical, that the idea of living a long life appeals to everyone, but the idea of getting old doesn't appeal to anyone.

Andy Rooney

When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Tolerance implies no lack of commitment to one's own beliefs. Rather it condemns the oppression or persecution of others.

John F. Kennedy

Always trust your fellow man. And always cut the cards. Always trust God. And always build your house on high ground. Always love thy neighbor. And always pick a good neighborhood to live in.

Robert Fulghum