

Things Happen in the Park

By Steve Long, MD

A boy yelled, "Stop crying!"

As I turned toward him, he pushed his sister. She landed, hard, bouncing on the cement.

Then she stood, head bowed, facing him.

"Why are you f...ing crying?" he shouted. He was thirteen or fourteen, big, sitting on a park bench, a cast on his leg, crutches at his side. His face was red, his hair short.

The girl, maybe five, had flat blond curls, and pale skin.

"Why can't you be happy like all the other kids here? Look around. They're all happy. Everyone here is happy but you. Stop your f...ing crying." He screamed in her face.

I couldn't hear her response. An old gentleman and his wife were sitting on the bench facing the boy. They had a black terrier.

The boy yelled, "Well then go swing on the swings. Have fun." The girl stood still, unmoving, with her head down.

In the twenty seconds this all took place, I had managed to convince myself that my angry stare was somehow going to make a difference.

The old man stood up. His wife stared off into space. The man and his dog walked away.

"Stop your crying," yelled the boy.

I stared.

A young woman walked up from behind the bench. "Where's your parent?" she asked, calmly. She was plain, thin, with glasses and mousy hair.

"My dad's at work." The boy replied.

"Where's your mom?" The woman asked.

"My mom abandoned me." The boy said.

At this point my daughter asked me to pick her up. The woman kneeled beside the boy. I couldn't hear anything else said. I carried my daughter to another part of the park. She played while I watched.

After awhile, the boy stopped staring straight ahead and looked at the young woman.

The woman took the sister to the slides. The woman again knelt next to the boy, then disappeared from my view, then came back to sit, at a slight distance, with her own group of friends.

The boy continued to sit on the bench, staring straight ahead. His sister was gone.

As my daughter played, I kept looking back. I wanted to go up to the woman, to thank her. To tell her she is brave and smart and wise.

"Time to go find mom," I said.

I carried my own daughter to our car, carefully strapped her into her car seat, and we drove away. ❖

Steve Long, MD, is an otolaryngologist at Northwest Permanente. He has a wife, Wendy, and two children, Zaidie and Eli. He enjoys film as well as writing.

