

Thomas Schneeweis - Children Books

Billy's Lesson

Sometimes, growing up is all about learning things. How to ride a bike? How to play with friends? Sometimes 'learning things' is not easy. We often must learn 'life's lessons the hard way; that is, by actually doing something.

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It wasn't that Billy never wanted to do anything it was just that he never saw any reason to do anything. "Let's go play baseball" his friends would say. Billy would say no. "Why go play baseball" he would say. "In two hours, the game would be done, and no one would remember who won or lost."

"Let's go for a bike ride," Billy's friends would say. "Why?" Billy would answer. "The farther one goes from the house, the farther one had to bike to get back and what happens if the bike breaks down while you are away."

Billy's parents were worried and could not figure out why Billy just didn't care about doing anything. Billy would never wash the car, make his bed, or play with his dog. Billy simply pointed out that if the car is washed it will just get dirty again, if the bed were made, he would have to pull back the sheets at night, and his dog, Scrappy, never seemed to remember whatever he did. "Why? Why? Why?" is all Billy ever said.

Soon, none of Billy's friends ever stopped over to ask him to do anything, his parents stopped asking him to do anything, even leave his room. Soon Billy never had to ask why, because no one ever asked Billy for anything. For a while Billy did not seem to care and from Billy's viewpoint it did not make any difference.

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One day when Billy left his room to sit on the porch of his house. Soon he saw his friends in a large van. “Where are you going?” Billy asked. “We were out playing baseball in the old park, when a local TV program came by who wanted a story about what kids do in the summer. Our story was shown on TV and it was so well received that the local baseball team offered us an entire day at their park, a visit with the players, and free seats for the game.” “Just for playing baseball?” Billy asked. “No,” his friends answered, “for playing baseball when someone drove by.”

Billy was a little jealous. While he did not particularly like baseball, he had always wanted to go to the baseball park of the local team. He had read it was one of the most beautiful baseball parks in the country and had great hot dogs. If he had been playing baseball with his friends, he would now be on that bus.

Billy was just about to go back into his house, when he saw one of his old friends, called Mark, on a new bike. Mark saw Billy on the porch and came to a stop. “Aren’t you going to the baseball park with the other kids?” Mark asked. “I thought you were a baseball player?” “Well, I haven’t recently.” Billy could not take his eyes off of Mark’s Bike. “Isn’t that a Treks Professional?” Billy asked. “You would never believe it” Mark answered. “With all of our friends out for the ballgame, I took a chance and entered a local bike race. If for no other reason that I was one of the few entrants. I won this. I never could have afforded it on my own.” Mark got back on his bike and took off.

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Bill was even more jealous this time. Even on his worse days, he could out bike Mark. Even if he had missed the baseball trip if he had just entered the bike race that bike would be his. Billy started to question if there might be some benefits to doing stuff like biking and playing baseball.

He turned around and was just about to walk into the house, when he heard his name being called. On the sidewalk, he could see another old friend of his, Jimmy Wilson, walking towards the house next to his. “I thought you would be going to the baseball park or biking to the lake” Jimmy said. “No” Billy answered. “I kind of took this summer off. I just never saw the need to get up for anything.” “You mean you never knew that you have new neighbors” “What?” Billy asked, “Yes they just moved in six weeks ago. You never look across the yard?” Jimmy asked. “No why?” Billy answered. “Well one of their kids, Trish, is our age. She did not know anyone in the area, so her Mom asked around. Since I don’t play baseball or bike, I was spending most of my time at the park learning tennis. I was even using the racquet you gave to me last year. It turns out Trish, the new girl across the street, is learning tennis too. We are just heading over to the Park.” As they were talking, Trish came out of the door. Billy’s mouth dropped wide open. He had never seen a thirteen year old like Trish. She was beautiful. For six weeks she was just 50 feet from his house, had no friends and was looking for someone to teach her tennis. This could have been him walking to the park with her.

As Jim and Trish headed out of view, Billy began to wonder. “Now one event could be random, two could be chance, but three in a row. Billy did not particularly like math in school, but he knew that the recent events looked more like a message.

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He started to think to himself. This is crazy, he thought. Even if I remain in the house for the rest of the summer and not waste my time in activities that are simply going nowhere. I will eventually go to the baseball park, I will get a new bike someday, and if I am not with Trish there are other girls I will meet in school.

Billy had almost convinced himself that it makes no sense to participate in anything if all that it means is that one has to depend on chance for really good things to happen. As he sat there, Billy started rolling the dice that his father had left on the table in front of the chair on the porch. Every once and a while Billy would roll a seven. Soon Billy started to count the number of sevens that came up on the dice. While he had to roll the dice many times before one came up, come up they did. During that summer, with nothing to do outside of the house, Billy had spent the time reading. Reading this and that, in fact reading everything he could get his hands onto, including books on science, books on math, even books on vacation spots like the island of Bermuda. What he saw in front of him, the random sevens from a constant game of throwing the dice, seemed to him a story of life. You have to be lucky to get a seven, but even if it is random, you can't get a seven, unless you throw the dice. You just never know. He turned to go into the house and heard the phone ring.

Despite his vow to never pick up the phone during that summer, he took a chance. He had learned that you have to try things out, for good things to happen. When he picked up the phone, he heard the voice on the other end of the phone ask, "is this Billy Taylor?." "Yes, I am Billy Taylor" he answered. "Well" the caller said, "for just answering this phone call you have won a free trip with your family to a vacation spot of your choice." Billy really wanted to take a trip

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with his family to a vacation spot just two hours from his house. Billy's entire family would be happy but more importantly, Billy had learned a lesson – sometimes you have to take a chance on doing something, play baseball, ride your bike, or even answer a phone call, if you are ever going to have any chance of something special happening.