

Children Are Not Rational

(Thank Goodness!)

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For more than a decade, I worked mostly with adults in my system's large, urban Central Library. It was steady and interesting work, and I got very good at identifying and answering intellectually rich reference questions. I knew my sources, and, being an adult myself, I could easily relate to my customers.

Adults were rational. Adults could generally, with guidance, articulate what they were looking for. In the context of our professional relationship of librarian and knowledge-seeker, adults were, more or less, how do you say—*sensible*.

And then, ten years ago, I became a children's librarian at a branch library, and my rational world was completely upended.

Children, I quickly discovered, were, how do you say—*not at all sensible*.

I'd forgotten, but now it started to come back to me. I remembered my foolish 5-year-old self. Kindergarten Laura absolutely knew she was going to marry Barry Manilow (such a ladies' man!), believed there was no flower more beautiful than a dandelion, and also somehow managed to be talked into drinking perfume because her sister convinced her it would give her magical powers. (*Spoiler alert: it did not.*)

Similarly, the children I formerly had the great and wonderful pleasure of working with in libraries showed that they were holding some truly ridiculous beliefs and engaged in behavior that is completely bonkers.

Namely, when they saw me in the library, or sometimes in a sandwich shop or grocery store, they acted as if I were some

combination of the Easter Bunny and a magical unicorn. They treated a sighting of Miss Laura as I would treat seeing Beyonce or George Clooney filling up a fountain drink at the corner convenience store. Some look at me with wide eyes and whisper, "I know her! She came to my school!" to each other. Others were bolder and told me directly with their high, clear voices, "I know you! You came to my school!" and looked at me with sheer awe.

"That's true!" I would say. "And I know YOU! I remember coming to your school! Wasn't that so much fun?"

Further proof that they did not have adult levels of intellectual logic or skepticism: they believed me, though my memory is like that *Memento* movie dude. (Really bad.) I have been known to forget things like my middle name, or what I had for breakfast that morning, so I certainly wouldn't recall what schools I had recently visited.

The first few times kids fanned out on me I was flattered but bewildered. "Hey, kid," I wanted to say, "I'm, like, not a big deal in any kind of way. So, I read a book about monsters to your class last month. It's literally one of the easiest and best things in the



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world to do, and your amazement is similar to if someone praised me for eating a chocolate chip cookie. OF COURSE I would eat a cookie. Cookies are awesome. Reading to school kids is even better than cookie-eating, truth be told. It's your teachers you need to revere as celebrities."

Children are particularly not like their adult counterparts in libraries because they do not seem to understand or respect titles, library hierarchy, or any other signifiers of importance that I have spent nearly two and a half decades trying to build. Instead of acknowledging the superiority of my two graduate degrees (*two! Both Summa cum laude!*) or my work on professional committees and such, they respond to such easy things as warm smiles, remembering their names, and asking friendly questions about their favorite animals.

It doesn't take much to earn their devotion. (*Nearly as easy as eating a chocolate chip cookie.*)

For example...

When I made a comment about the sparkles on her shoes, Julia embarked on a monologue of such intricacy and eloquence that I was stunned into silence and a few "Wows." That just inspired her to tell me even more about the significance of her matching socks. Every time after that, when she visited the library, she made a point to find me to show me many more special sartorial choices.

Oliver, who had missed storytimes for a few months because of preschool, made himself sick with excitement about spring break storytime. "He would NOT go to sleep last night," his mother said. "He kept talking and talking about Miss Laura and storytime."

I mean, I made puppets say, "Boop!" and sing like a frog. It isn't rocket science, Oliver.

I wasn't really special. Children's librarians have a million of these stories. Once, however, I temporarily caught the kids' mania and thought I had to be pretty hot stuff to be causing this level of fandom. Well, of course! It was because of my careful planning and encyclopedic knowledge of early literacy concepts, and did I mention, I have two graduate degrees?



And then I subbed for another librarian at her storytime, and whew, did it not go well. One boy turned his back on me for the entire session because **That! Is! Not! Miss! Tatiana!** and another cried in the corner because I didn't use the same puppet as Miss Tatiana. My humility was immediately restored.

I saved it somewhat with bubbles and stickers because, did I mention, children are easier than adults in some ways? I may have not been Miss Tatiana, but bubbles are serious magic for two-year-olds.

No matter.

I still love their little faces, their irrational smiles, and hot sticky hugs, even (sometimes) their crying and carrying on. Why they insist on loving the library, and me, and all of my other extraordinary colleagues, to such an incredible degree is baffling but wonderful. I wouldn't change a single thing about their precious illogical selves.

How lucky we are to protect and love them. They will (alas) become sensible adults soon enough. &