

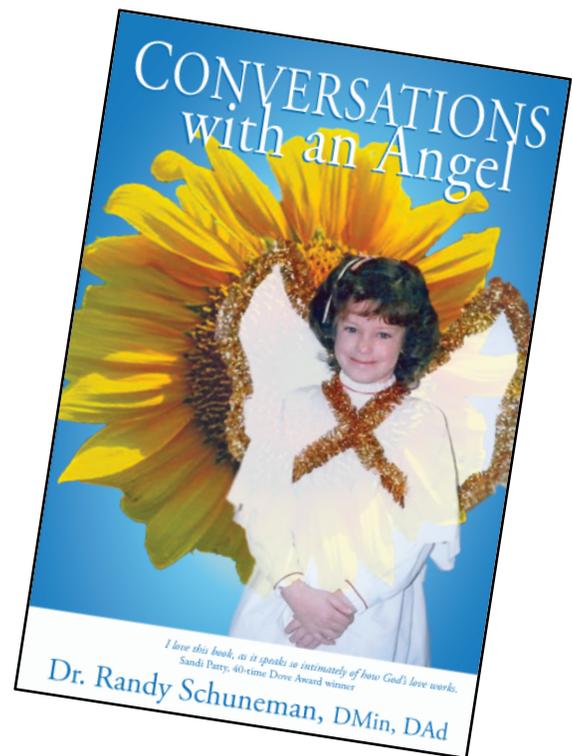
A HARD FIRST DAY!

a *Conversations with an Angel* “web extra”

by Randy Schuneman

I recently called a number of my favorite children who had just finished their first day of school. It was fun to hear how well things were going. It got responses that varied from, “I loved it!” to “I hated it!” The only common denominator was that all the parents had been crying. I know that feeling.

A new milestone has begun in their life. It will never be the same again. You realize that your child will not be home with you as much. You will have to “wrestle” them to bed each night, because it is NOT okay to have them grouchy with their teacher. Your mind “fast-forwards” to their graduation from college, their wedding and raising their family. Friends try to help by saying things like, “They grow up so fast!” or “I remember when Johnny was a kindergartener. Now he has three kids of his own.”



I realize that most parents drive their children to school for this momentous day. Unfortunately, Bonnie and I only had one car plus I was watching Robbie while I studied.

Bonnie had to go to work, so we had to watch as Jennie loaded in for her first bus ride ever. There were several older children that assured me they would take good care of her. I trusted them ... BIG MISTAKE!

I anxiously awaited the arrival of the bus to deliver Jennie safely back home. We would talk about her day's experience, cuddle for a little bit and wait for Momma's arrival home later in the day. The bus arrived on time. I watched several familiar faces unload the bus, running and screaming for joy. The bus was nearly empty when Stephanie, our neighbor girl, got off the bus. I watched in horror as I realized that the bus was empty and Jennie was not on it.

I admitted shouted, "Stephanie, where is Jennie?"

Stephanie answered calmly, "Oh, she got off the bus a few stops back!"

Panicked, I shouted again, "Where did she get off?"

Stephanie again calmly replied, "I don't know for sure!"

I do not have a car. I have a one-year-old son who cannot be left alone. I have no idea where Jennie is. Question: What do you do in a situation like that? Answer: PANICK unashamedly. It had been several minutes since Jennie had been dropped off. I did think clearly enough to call a friend and church member who lived nearby. Dean was a pilot, but luckily had the day off. He came to the house, loaded Robbie in with us (no

car seats required in those days) and we headed for the most likely places Jennie might be.

We started heading west on the closest road to us. Street after street there was no sign of Jennie. There was road work being done in the subdivision so some streets could not be used. Finally, I spotted this little four-year-old girl in a blue dress, an unmistakable blonde wig and a backpack walking down one of the streets. The street was blocked off for road repair, but Dean got me close enough to yell.

I yelled at the top of my voice, “Jennie, it is Daddy. I am coming to get you. It is going to be okay.”

Although I am flat-footed and never have been able to run fast, I gave it everything I had. I ran to her, grabbed her in my arms and carried her back to the car. I think I understand a little of what the Father felt like when he saw the Prodigal Son.

Once safely back in the car, I asked Jennie, “Honey, why did you get off the bus so soon?”

Jennie innocently said, “The bus driver told us that he thought a kindergartener lived on this street. I was a kindergartener, so I got off!”

Jennie was just trying to be obedient. The bus driver did not know his route yet. Needless to say, he did know the route better the next day. He delivered Jennie “safe and sound” from that day forward. He was too scared NOT to. If you want to see my “bad side,” try messing with my kids.

Jennie came home crying one day in Flint, Michigan. She told me that a male had hit her in the stomach. I ran from the house, grabbed that

guy by his collar and told him in no uncertain terms, “Don’t you EVER touch my daughter. DO YOU HEAR ME?”

With great fear and trembling, he answered, “Yes, sir. It will never happen again.”

I sent that 10-year-old boy home in tears. I dusted off my hands and then looked at his group of friends and said, “You want a piece of the action. Bring it on!” With great pride, I smiled as I watched them scatter.

It was not so pleasant when the boy’s ex-Marine father showed up at my door that evening. But still... (that part did not happen)