

## Duman Elementary 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Talent Show

School is different from what I remember it being. First off, why do all parents have to be so egotistical when it comes to their kids? I don't care if your child is on the honor roll, or the soccer team, they are not special. Neither are you, for that matter. You're an average to bad parent just like the rest of us. You're not fooling anyone.

I'll give an example: the talent show. How could one forget the magical Duman Elementary annual 1<sup>st</sup> grade talent show? I want to know whose genius idea it was to make a talent show for little children.

*Aw, 1<sup>st</sup> graders, so cute, right? Think again.*

I don't care if they did well or not, most at least tried. What I have a problem with is the parents comparing their kids with each other. That just makes the parents feel better about themselves and the kids feel worse. They're in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, they all suck. The most talented of them are at a low 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level, at best.

The magical evening was hosted by the vice-principal. This was her big night to shine. She was gunning for principal next year, everyone knew it. I followed my son into the dimly lit multi-purpose room, and he disappeared behind the stage, leaving me bored and alone in the sea of mingling parents. Smooth jazz was playing in the background, complete with punch and hors d'oeuvres. She was serving *hors d'oeuvres* at a 1<sup>st</sup> grade talent show. I even found myself scanning the room for a cocktail bar at one point.

All the kids were behind the curtain dealing with their stress, while their parents were out here bragging about them, or themselves, with each other. I didn't feel like joining. I was about to go find a seat when all of a sudden something three feet high ran into me. I turned around.

“Woah, you okay there?” I asked and helped the little girl to her feet. She was wearing a pink dress that looked like a life-size replica of a barbie outfit or something.

“No,” she said, “I need to find my mom. All the other girls have makeup, but I don’t have any.” She was crying by the end of her talk.

I looked around. No one else even noticed her.

“You know where your mom is?”

She shook her head, crying even more.

“Hey, hey, it’s okay. Here,” I said, and grabbed a napkin to dab her tears. “There. You look beautiful. You don’t need that makeup stuff anyways.”

“Yes I do,” she sniffed.

“No, you’ll outshine the rest of them, no doubt in my mind. Let’s find your mom. What’s her name?”

“Linda,” she said, and she instinctively gripped my hand as we walked around the expansive room.

“I’m Brody’s dad,” I said, “you know Brody?”

She nodded her head. The crying had stopped at least.

After yelling *Linda* for the seventh time, a woman turned her head to us. I could see her expression go all the way from confused to startled to upset to feigned gratefulness on her way over to us.

“Oh, thank you,” was all she said to me before taking her child’s hand and walking away.

“What’s wrong, sweetie?”

"You're welcome," I replied to her deaf ears.

I found a seat just as the show was beginning. I remember the vice-principal strutting up the steps of the stage in her blue skirt suit, determined to outdo all previous 1<sup>st</sup> grade talent show hosts. The music stopped. Some chewing and chattering continued.

“Ahem," the woman was not clearing her throat, she actually said ‘*ahem.*’ I hate that.

"Good evening everyone, as you know, I'm Vice-Principal Keystone, and welcome to our Duman Elementary 1<sup>st</sup> grade talent show!"

There were just a few claps. She knew she needed to up her game.

“Really, truly, your children are the kindest, smartest, most wonderful children I have ever had the pleasure of working with,” she spoke louder. Got the whole room applauding with that one. “I mean that from the bottom of my heart.”

I looked around at the audience. They were buying this crap? Last week my boy told me the whole classroom ganged up on Jeffery, making fun of him for having long eyelashes. He said he didn’t join in, but I still wouldn’t call him kind, let alone smart.

“There is so much passion and talent in all of these students. I know we’re all in for a very special treat tonight.”

While she was explaining the show, I saw about a third of the parents stand up and get their iPhones out to start filming. Really? They were going to record the entire show? I could barely sit through this once, let alone again at home.

The first kid up was John, Mike Matthews' kid. I remembered him from last year's kindergarten show when he did one single somersault, at least that's what I think he was attempting, but no one really knows what that was. We couldn't wait to see what the prodigy had in store for us this time. John waltzed up on stage, tried to pull a cartwheel— *twice*— and then took a bow. Most people didn't even know if they were supposed to clap for that or not until Tightskirt said, "Let's have a round of applause for that wonderful performance."

Mike, it's good that you don't put any pressure on your kid to be that impressive, but please for everyone's sake, set the bar just a little higher. You could see John was way too proud of that little half-cartwheel he did.

Next was Jazmine Demarco, the singer. She walked on in a glittery wedding dress that looked like it would cost as much as my mom's health insurance, and she has diabetes. Her song started— *I Like It*, by Cardi B. The music was so loud, I could only hear Jazmine singing when she got off-key, which really was often enough. Killed the crowd, they loved it, some even started clapping to the beat near the end.

People either take this too seriously or don't care at all. I could see her lawyer dad in the corner talking on the phone the whole time. Her mother was in the front row, mouthing the lyrics and doing hand motions to her child as if that would help her remember them.

Jeffery came out next, did something with a yoyo, I think. All I remember were those ginormous eyelashes. Brody wasn't lying.

Then a whole lot more singing and dancing, which upset me. In almost every single talent show I've ever seen in person or on TV, a singer has won. It drives me nuts. Little kids singing is

not even cute for me anymore, this ruined it. If I see one more seven-year-old that thinks they can sing, I'll lose it.

Even that barbie dress girl was a part of it. I shouldn't have encouraged her. At least she looked confident enough on stage without makeup. I can't believe how many seven-year-olds wear makeup now.

Thank God my son is so much more creative than all that. He built something for his act. I couldn't calm Brody down on the drive there. He was so scared, shaking in his seat holding his shoebox.

"It's fine," I told him, "You'll do great, you really will."

It didn't help that we were "late," meaning we were fifteen minutes early, but still the last ones to show up. As soon as I parked the car, he didn't even say bye, he just sprinted into the building with his little legs, holding his box out in front of him.

What kind of pressure do they put on these kids?

After I had sat through an hour of that singing crap, Brody was finally up. He walked onstage with his shoebox trembling in his hands and no background music or anything. Just dead silence. He methodically opened his box and dumped out a whole bunch of Legos. A few parents laughed. The smug rich ones who knew beyond a doubt that the Beyoncé Lip Sync was going to win the talent show.

Something happened to the audience during Brody's act, though. I saw all the faces turn from amused to captivated. In less than one minute, Brody made a perfect model helicopter from fifty pieces. My kid memorized the exact steps it took to make this thing. He spent hours

perfecting the process until he could do it in less than a minute. He used only the pieces he needed, and the helicopter came out looking impressively detailed.

People started clapping one by one. I saw some parents begin to look at each other with expressions of *not bad*, and *that was pretty cool*. Some still laughed. I whistled and clapped louder than all of them. Little did we know that he wasn't done with his act yet. While the audience was applauding, he twirled the propeller and then chucked the helicopter into the air. Most people stopped clapping then. It flew in a big arc and came crashing down in front of the chairs where it exploded into fifty individual Lego pieces again. Everyone was stunned. All clapping stopped, all laughter stopped, everything was just silent.

"Yes!" I laughed and clapped again, alone. Then he bowed and walked off the stage before they had any time to react.

"Well wasn't that fun," Tightskirt said and hurriedly started the next set while people were murmuring about what had just happened. Then, while the next act was going, my son came out into the audience. No other kids did this the whole night. He picked up every one of the Legos scattered across the floor. Whenever he walked by a parent, they would whisper, "good job," to him. He just smiled at all of them.

Then something sparked in me that made me need Brody to win. Not because he was so much better than all these other kids, but to show these parents that he wasn't worse. *I'm one of them*, I thought, but I couldn't help it.

Whether he won or not, at least he stood out, which is more than anyone expected of him. I remember joining his class on bring your parent to school day. I hate that day. It resembles the

talent show in more ways than one. All the other parents were wearing nice ties and slacks. I was too, but it didn't mean anything, not when you're the garbage man.

They loved the firefighter, the police officer, the doctor, and even the construction worker. None of the rest of us even had a chance. At least the lawyer was as boring as I had expected. His daughter was playing games on her phone the whole time he was speaking. Serves him right. Girl-with-no-makeup's mother wasn't bad, a journalist for National Geographic. But of course, most of the kids barely understood what a journalist was. Went over their heads.

When my son, that angel, introduced me to his class, he was as proud as any of the other kids there. "My dad's a garbage collector and he's a great dad," he said. Then it was my turn to say something about the job, but how much can a guy really say about that?

All I said was, "Well, someone's gotta do it." Got a few laughs.

At the end of the night when the winner was decided, I was just as nervous as everyone else. *Show 'em, Brody.*

"And the winner is," the vice principal said and paused for effect, "...Jazmine Demarco!"

*You gotta be kidding me.* Cardi B girl. Her dad's eyes perked up when her name was mentioned. First time his concentration was not on his phone. She came out on the stage again dancing. Applause everywhere. Her mother screamed and ran up to the stage. I could swear there were tears in her eyes.