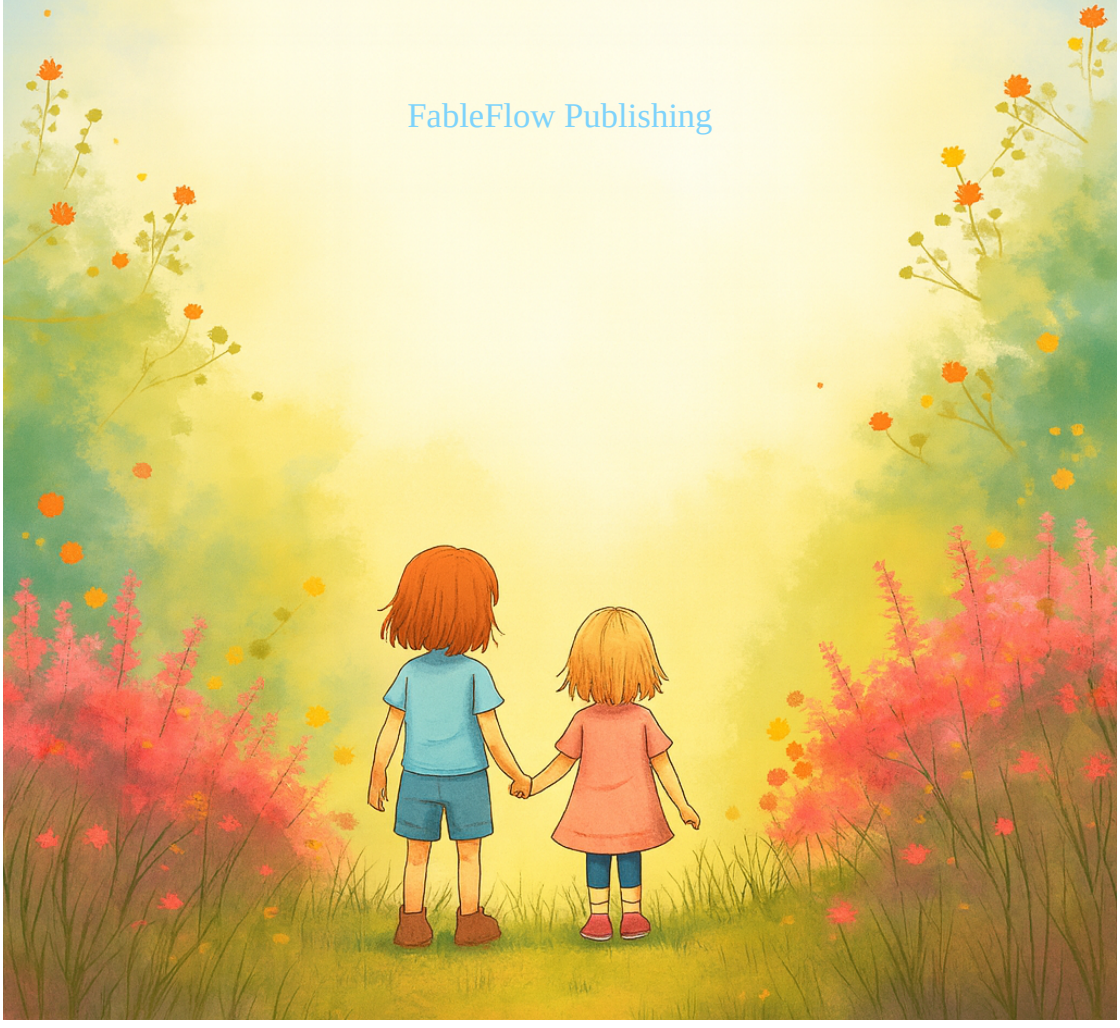
# The Magic of YET

## A Growth Mindset Adventure

By Suneeta Mall

FableFlow Publishing



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# Contents

# A Note to Readers

Dear Young Reader,

Have you ever felt like giving up? Maybe you couldn't solve a puzzle, or you fell off your bike, or a math problem seemed impossible. This book holds a secret that can change everything: the magic word YET.

Inside these pages, you'll meet Cassie and Caleb, two kids just like you who discover that their brains can grow stronger every single day. When Cassie struggles with math and Caleb's block towers keep falling, they learn something amazing from real scientist Dr. Carol Dweck: mistakes aren't failures—they're clues that show your brain is building new pathways, like trails through a forest that get clearer each time you walk them.

This story is for every child who has ever thought "I can't." Because the truth is, you can't... yet. And that tiny word makes all the difference. So turn the

page, join Cassie and Caleb's adventure, and discover the superpower you've had inside you all along: the power to grow, learn, and become stronger with every challenge you face.

Your brain is amazing. Let's watch it grow!

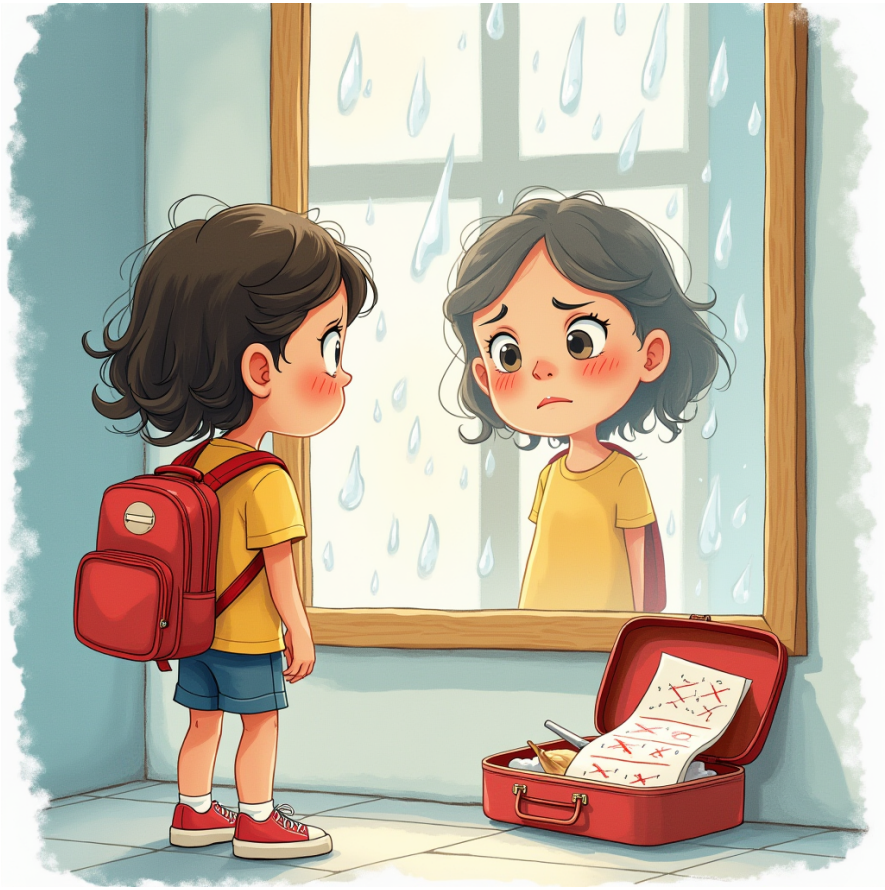
# Chapter 1: The Question That Changed Everything

The bathroom mirror showed Cassie exactly what she didn't want to see: a girl who had failed.

She was seven years old, and the crumpled math worksheet hidden beneath her lunchbox felt heavier than her entire backpack. Three problems marked with red X's—three proof marks that Maya was smart and she wasn't.

"I'm stupid," she whispered to her reflection.

The words tasted like burnt toast—bitter and wrong, but somehow real.



*Sometimes the hardest person to face is yourself.*

Rain drummed against the window as she sat at dinner that night, pushing peas around her plate in slow, careful circles. Dad noticed. Dad always noticed.

"Rough day, kiddo?"

Cassie shrugged, building a mashed potato mountain to avoid looking up.

"She got math problems wrong," Caleb announced helpfully, green beans dangling from his fork. "Maya got hers all right."

"Caleb!" Mom's voice carried that warning tone.

"It's true though." Cassie's voice came out smaller than she intended. "Maya's smart. I'm not."

Dad set down his fork with a soft *clink*. "Can I tell you something that changed my whole life when I was your age?"

Cassie looked up. Dad didn't usually talk about being a kid.

"My grandmother—your great-grandmother Ruth—she found me crying in the barn once. I was eight, maybe nine, and my cousin Jake could ride

horses like he was born in the saddle. He'd gallop across the field, standing in the stirrups, whooping and laughing. I'd tried all morning and kept falling. My backside hurt, my pride hurt worse."

Caleb giggled. "You fell off a horse?"

"Many times. And I told Grandma Ruth exactly what Cassie just said: 'Jake's good at this. I'm not.'"

"What did she say?" Cassie asked.

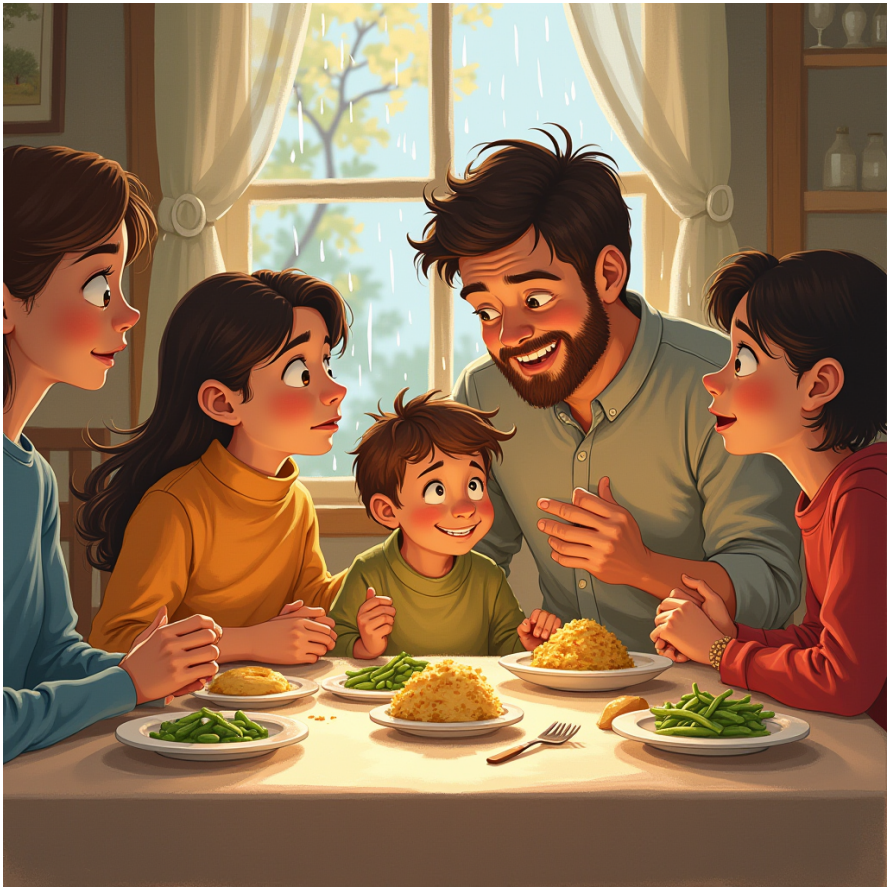
Dad's eyes got that faraway look, like he was watching a memory play out. "She knelt right down in the dirt—and Grandma Ruth never knelt in dirt, she always said it ruined good pants—and she asked me a question I've never forgotten." He paused, letting the moment settle. "She said, 'Are you telling me you can't ride a horse, or that you can't ride one yet?'"

The kitchen grew quiet except for the rain and Caleb's chewing.

"What's the difference?" Cassie asked.

"That's exactly what I said." Dad smiled. "And Grandma Ruth, she took my face in her hands—her palms smelled like bread dough and lavender—and she whispered:

*Can't builds a wall so high and wide*
*No door, no window, locked inside*
*But yet—oh, yet!—holds open doors*
*Your story's middle, not the close*
*The book's not finished, dear sweet child*
*Your tale's still growing, running wild!*



*Dad shares Grandma Ruth's special words that turned "can't" into "can't yet.*

Four-year-old Caleb's eyes went wide. "That's like magic words!"

The surprise that flashed across everyone's faces was followed by warm laughter, sudden as sun breaking through clouds.

"It felt like magic to me too," Dad said softly. "Those words—that difference between can't and can't yet—changed how I saw everything. Not just horse riding. Everything."

"What about growing wings?" Caleb asked seriously. "Can I do that yet?"

"Probably not," Dad admitted, "but you can learn about birds, or fly planes someday, or study how wings work. The yet opens up possibilities we can't see from here. It tells your brain to keep the door open, to stay curious, to believe the story isn't over."

That night, Cassie lay in bed listening to rain tap-dance on the roof. She'd always believed people were sorted—smart or not smart, good at things or bad at things, like laundry separated into whites

and colors with nothing in between.

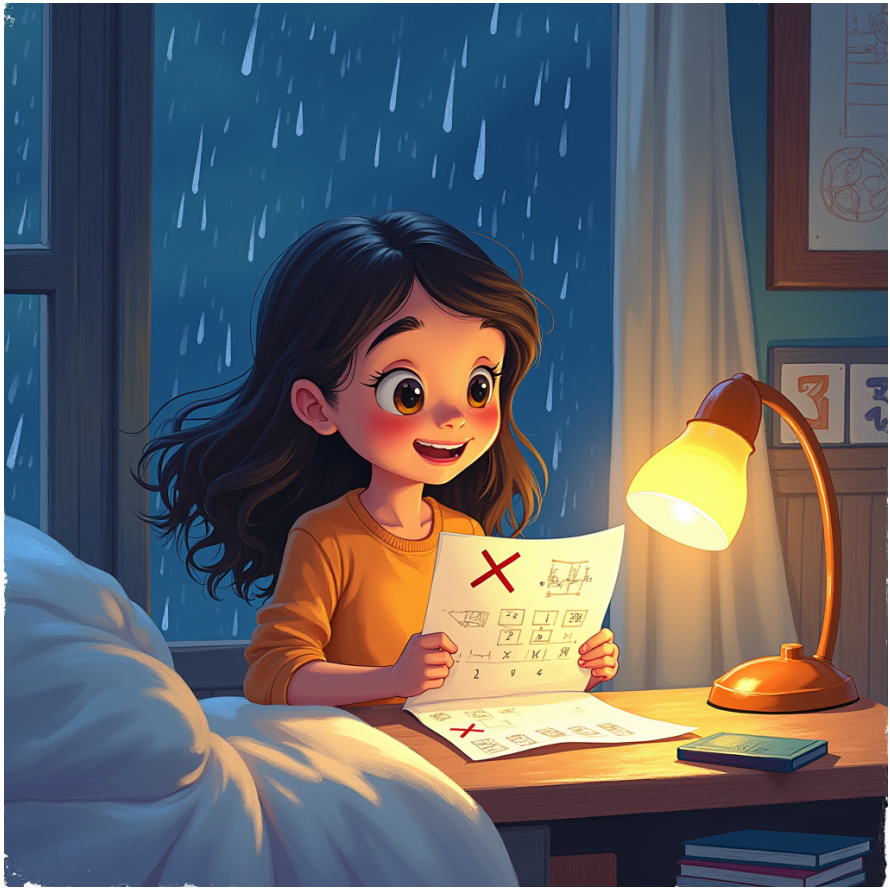
But what if that wasn't true?

She slipped out of bed, tiptoed to her backpack, and pulled out the crumpled worksheet. Under her reading lamp, it looked different somehow. Not proof of her stupidity—a map. The red X's weren't failures; they were markers showing exactly where she didn't understand *yet*.

The first problem: She'd added when she should have subtracted.
The second: She'd forgotten to carry the one.
The third: She'd mixed up the order of numbers.

Each mistake made sense now. Each one taught her something specific.

She smoothed out the worksheet and placed it in her homework folder, no longer hidden. Tomorrow, she'd ask Ms. Chen about carrying the one. Tomorrow, she'd practice.



*Cassie smooths out her mistakes, ready to learn and try again tomorrow.*

Tomorrow, her story would still be being written.

And Cassie whispered Grandma Ruth's words into the quiet dark, feeling them settle into her bones like seeds:

*Can't builds walls*
*Yet opens doors*
*My story's middle*
*Not the close.*

## Chapter 2: Cassie's Wobbly Wheels

The purple bicycle appeared in the garage on Saturday morning like a birthday present, even though Cassie's birthday was months away.

"Surprise!" Mom called from the driveway. "Mrs. Chen's daughter outgrew it and thought you'd love it."

Cassie's heart leaped. No training wheels—just two thin tires and infinite possibility gleaming in the morning sun. She ran her hand over the handlebars, imagining herself flying down the sidewalk, hair streaming behind her like a superhero cape.

"This is going to be so easy," she announced. "I'm the fastest scooter rider on the whole block. Everyone says so."

She thought about yesterday, when she'd raced Marcus from the corner to the stop sign and won by three full seconds. She could zoom down hills, carve sharp turns, and stop on a dime. Riding something with wheels? She had this.

"Want me to help you get started?" Mom offered, setting down her coffee mug.

"No thanks." Cassie waved her off confidently. "I've got this. Scootering and biking are basically the same thing—you balance, you steer, you go. I'll probably be riding in like, five minutes."

Mom and Dad exchanged one of those parent looks—the kind that said volumes in silence—but stepped back onto the porch.

Cassie approached the bike exactly like she'd approach her scooter: one foot on a pedal, push off hard with the other foot, swing the second leg over. Easy.

The bike lurched violently sideways and dumped her onto the grass before she'd traveled two feet.

"Oof!"

Seven attempts later, Cassie's knee was grass-stained and scraped, her palms burned, and frustration bubbled in her chest like a shaken soda bottle.

"This is STUPID!" She threw her helmet across the lawn. "I'm good at this! I'm good at riding things with wheels! Why isn't this WORKING?"

From the porch, Dad called out gently, "Can I come sit with you?"

"I don't NEED help! I KNOW how to do this!"

Dad walked over anyway and lowered himself onto the grass a few feet away. He didn't speak. Didn't offer advice. Just sat there, present and patient, while Cassie's breathing slowly returned to

normal.

After a while, the anger deflated, leaving behind something that felt like confusion and hurt.

"I don't understand," Cassie said finally, her voice small and raw. "I'm good at balancing. I'm really good at steering. I can go fast and not fall. Why can't I do this?"

"Can I ask you something?" Dad's voice was gentle, curious rather than correcting.

"What."

"What have you been trying?"

"Everything I know from scootering! Pushing off with one foot like I do on my scooter. Leaning to steer like I do on my scooter. Keeping my weight centered like I do on my scooter. It works perfectly there!"

"Ahh." Dad nodded slowly. "I think I see what's happening. You came to the bike expecting it to be like the scooter. So you've been trying to make the bike behave like a scooter."

"Well... yeah." Cassie frowned. "They're both things with wheels that you ride and steer. They should work the same."

"They look similar. But here's the thing—they work fundamentally differently. On a scooter, you balance over a wide, stable platform with one foot always ready to touch the ground. You push with your foot on solid earth. You steer primarily by leaning your whole body. On a bike, you balance over a narrow seat suspended between two wheels—nothing touching the ground when you're moving. You push with pedals in a continuous circular motion. You steer mainly with the handlebars. The skills look similar from the outside, but they're actually quite different."

Cassie stared at the bike, really looked at it for the first time. She'd been so sure she already knew what to do that she hadn't actually paid attention to what the bike needed.

"Here's something important about learning," Dad continued. "Sometimes the hardest person to teach is someone who thinks they already know. Not because they're not smart—you're incredibly smart—but because they're not open. They're so busy applying what they already know that they can't see what's actually in front of them."

Dad reached over and picked up a dandelion, twirling it between his fingers. Then he started to chant softly:

Open eyes see
What closed minds miss
Fresh eyes notice
What's really there
Begin again
With wonder's stare!

"That's silly," Cassie said, but she smiled a little.

"Silly but true. You have to see the bike as it actually is, not as you assume it should be."

"So... my scooter skills were actually making this harder?"

"Not the skills themselves—your assumptions about them. You assumed the bike would work like

the scooter. When it didn't, you didn't adjust your approach. You just tried the same scooter techniques harder and harder, expecting different results."

"What should I have done?"

"Noticed. After that first fall, instead of thinking 'push harder,' you could have thought, 'Hmm, that didn't work. What's different about this bike? What is it trying to tell me? What does it need that's different from my scooter?' Observation instead of assumption. Curiosity instead of certainty."

Mom walked over with two glasses of lemonade, condensation beading on the glass like morning dew. "Ready to try together? I can point out some things that might help."

Cassie looked at the bike—really looked, with beginner's eyes this time. Then at her parents. She took a breath and consciously released her grip on certainty.

"Okay. But... will you tell me what you see? I think I've been missing stuff because I thought I already saw everything."

Mom held the back of the bike seat, her grip firm and steady. "See how you're leaning your whole body to the left, trying to steer like on your scooter? On a bike, try keeping your body more upright and steering with the handlebars instead—they do most of the work. And when you pedal, watch—it's a smooth continuous circle, not a push-and-coast like you do on your scooter. Feel the difference?"

It felt completely wrong at first. Unnatural. Everything in Cassie's body wanted to do what it knew.

But she focused on what the *bike* needed, not what her *scooter experience* told her.

After a few attempts, she made it ten feet before putting her foot down.

"That felt so weird!" she breathed. "But also... right? Like I was working with the bike instead of against it."

Over the next two weeks, Cassie learned to ride—really ride. She discovered that some scooter skills did transfer once she understood how bikes were different. Her balance helped her recover from wobbles. Her confidence helped her try scary things. Her speed sense helped her gauge momentum.

But she'd had to let go of her assumptions first. She'd had to become curious instead of certain.

The hardest part of learning to ride a bike, she realized, wasn't the balance or the pedaling.

It was learning to stay open when every fiber of her being thought it already knew.

**What Cassie Learned:**

✓ Sometimes being good at one thing can make

learning a similar thing harder

✓ Staying curious matters more than being certain

✓ Your brain can get stuck in "I already know" mode

✓ Asking "What's different?" opens doors

## Chapter 3: The Tower That Kept Falling

The block tower crashed for the eighth time.

Caleb's scream could probably be heard in the next county.

"I HATE BLOCKS! I HATE TOWERS! I HATE GRAVITY! I HATE EVERYTHING IN THE WHOLE WORLD!"

His arm swept across the remaining blocks, scattering them like rainbow confetti across the playroom floor. Then he threw himself face-down on the carpet and wailed—not crying exactly, but that particular four-year-old sound of pure frustration that needs to get *out*.

Mom sat down cross-legged on the floor nearby. She didn't reach for him. Didn't try to fix it or comfort or make it better. Just sat, present and patient, a steady anchor in his storm.

Eventually, after what felt like forever but was probably two minutes, Caleb's wailing turned to hiccupping breaths. He rolled over and looked at her with red-rimmed eyes.

"I'm really, really, really mad," he announced.

"I can see that. Your whole body looks mad. It's frustrating when something keeps not working the way you want."

"It falls down EVERY TIME." His voice broke on the last word. "Every single time I get it tall."

"Mmm. And when it falls, how do you feel inside?"

Caleb sat up, thinking hard. "Mad. Really mad. And..." He paused. "Embarrassed."

"Embarrassed? Can you tell me more about that?"

"Because I'm supposed to be able to do it." His voice got smaller. "Marcus can make towers that touch the ceiling almost. And I can't even make one that's taller than me. So I'm bad at towers."

Mom nodded slowly, her expression serious and focused. "Caleb, I want to tell you something really important. Something true. Can you listen with your whole body?"

Caleb knew what that meant. He sat up straight, crossed his legs criss-cross applesauce, and looked directly at her face. Whole body listening.

"Mistakes and failures aren't signs that something is wrong with you. They're not proof you're bad or broken or not smart. They're messages. Information. Every time your tower falls, it's trying to teach you something."

"Towers can't talk," Caleb said skeptically. "They don't have mouths."

"Not with words, no. But they communicate through what happens. Every time your tower falls, it's giving you information about what didn't work—and that information helps you figure out what might work better. The falling is the lesson." Mom started to chant softly:

Towers that tumble
Tell tales that are true
'Too heavy on top!
Wobbles won't do!'
Listen close
To what falling shows
Each crash is a teacher
That helps knowledge grow!

Caleb looked at the scattered blocks with new eyes, like he was seeing them for the first time. "So... when my tower falls... it's teaching me?"

"Exactly. Think about it like this: if your tower never fell, how would you know if you were building it well? The falling gives you feedback. It

says, 'That arrangement didn't work—try something different.' It's not mean or bad. It's just... information."

Cassie wandered in with her library book and sat down, pretending to read but clearly listening.

Mom continued, her voice taking on that storytelling quality: "There's a real scientist named Dr. Carol Dweck who studies how people learn. She works at a big university called Stanford, and she discovered something amazing. When she studied people who became really, really skilled at things—athletes, musicians, scientists, artists—she found they thought about mistakes completely differently than other people."

"How?" Caleb leaned forward.

"They didn't see mistakes as failures or as proof they weren't good enough. They saw them as clues. Like detectives collecting evidence. Every mistake was another piece of information helping them

solve the mystery of how to do something well."

"Like Blue's Clues?" Caleb's face lit up. "We're looking for clues!"

"Exactly like that! Every mistake is a pawprint leading you to understanding. When scientists do experiments, do you know what happens most of the time?"

"What?"

"The experiments fail. They don't work. But scientists don't say 'I'm bad at science' and give up. They say, 'Interesting! That didn't work. What did I learn? What should I try differently?' The experiments that fail teach them just as much as the ones that work—sometimes more."

Caleb picked up a block and studied it like it was a fascinating creature. "So when my tower fell those eight times... I got eight clues?"

"What do you think the clues were telling you?"

Caleb stared at the scattered blocks, his face scrunched in concentration. "Um... maybe... maybe the bottom wasn't strong enough? It was wobbly before it fell. The bottom was too small and the top was too heavy?"

"That's a hypothesis! That's what scientists call their best guess about why something happens. Want to test your hypothesis?"

Caleb started building again, but this time he made the base wider—six blocks across instead of three. He built up slowly, checking for wobbles. The tower was more stable. He got to six blocks high before it swayed and toppled.

But this time, instead of screaming, he sat back on his heels and studied the wreckage like a detective at a crime scene.

"Hmm," he said thoughtfully. "I put that big block on top and it was too heavy. The whole thing tipped over. I should put heavy blocks on the

bottom and light blocks up high."

Mom smiled but didn't say anything—she just watched.

Twenty minutes later, Caleb had built a tower twelve blocks high. But more importantly, something had shifted in how he related to the falling. Each crash was no longer a judgment about him—it was information about the tower.

"Mom?" He looked up, eyes bright. "Is it weird that I kind of like when it falls now? Because then I get to figure out why and make it better?"

"That's not weird at all, honey. That's called being curious instead of defeated. And curiosity is the engine that drives all learning. When you're curious about your mistakes instead of ashamed of them, you're basically unstoppable."

Cassie closed her book. "Is that true for math tests too?"

"Absolutely. Every wrong answer is information about what you don't understand yet. The kids who get better at math aren't the ones who never make mistakes—they're the ones who pay attention to their mistakes and learn from them."

"So mistakes are actually... helpful?" Cassie's voice carried wonder and skepticism in equal measure.

"They're essential. Learning without mistakes would be like trying to find treasure without a map. The mistakes show you where to dig, where to explore, where to pay attention. They're not your enemies. They're your teachers—if you're willing to listen to what they're trying to tell you."

Caleb carefully placed one more block on top of his tower. It wobbled, steadied, held.

"I'm listening," he whispered to the tower. "Tell me what you need."

### What Caleb Learned:

✓ Mistakes are information, not judgment

✓ Every failure is a clue about what to try next

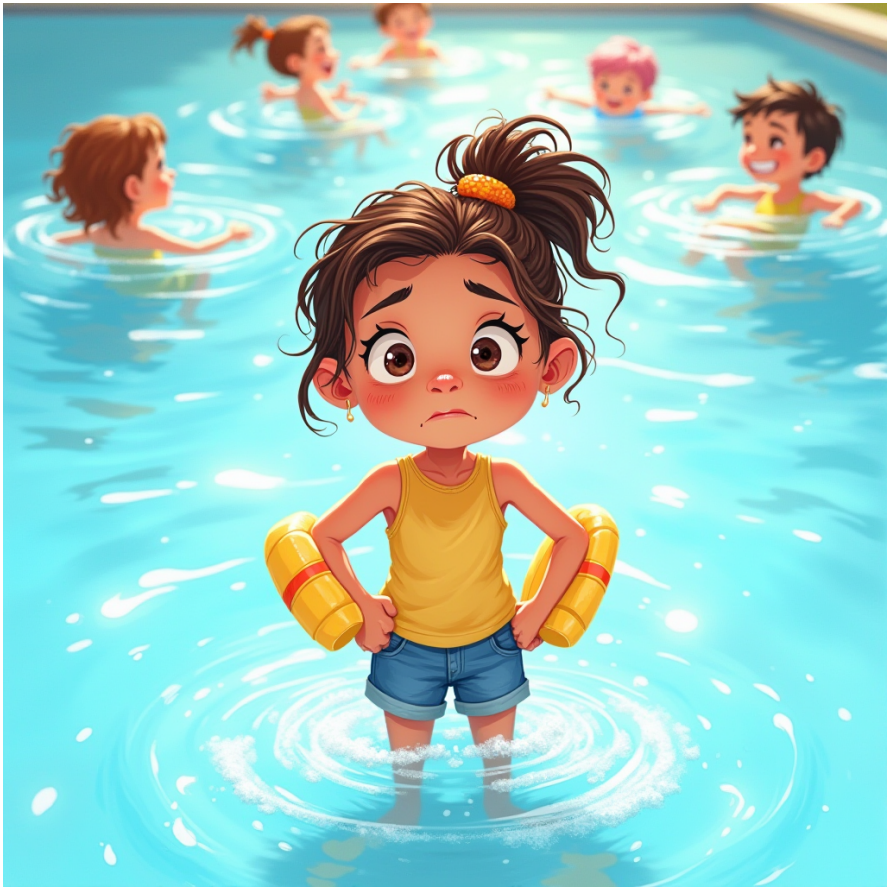
✓ Being curious about mistakes helps you learn faster

✓ Scientists use mistakes to make discoveries

## Chapter 4: The Swimming Secret

"I'll sink."

Cassie stood in the shallow end where the water came up to her waist, sunlight dancing on the surface like scattered diamonds. Around her, other kids were laughing, splashing, dunking under and popping back up like it was nothing.



*Cassie worries she'll sink while everyone else splashes and plays.*

"I just know I'll sink. And I'll breathe in water and choke and die probably."

This was her third swimming lesson with Miss Rosa. She still hadn't put her face in the water—not once. Every time she tried, panic grabbed her throat like a cold hand and she jerked back up, gasping.

Maya was already swimming across the pool. Marcus could do underwater handstands. Even kindergartener Sophie could bob up and down five times in a row.

Cassie felt like a failure wearing floaties.

Miss Rosa waded over, moving through the water with the easy grace of someone completely at home in it. She stood right beside Cassie, close enough to touch but not touching.

"Let's take a little break from trying," Miss Rosa said quietly. "Can I tell you something I've noticed about you?"

Cassie nodded, shivering despite the warm August air.

"You're trying really, really hard to control everything. I can see it in your body—your shoulders are up by your ears, your hands are clenched into fists, your whole body is tight like a spring wound too tight. You're holding your breath before you even get near the water. You're trying to make your body do something while also fighting against it."

"I don't understand."

Miss Rosa demonstrated, letting her shoulders drop and her arms float loose. "See? When I'm tense like this"—she stiffened up, shoulders hunched, fists clenched—"my body fights itself. My muscles are working against each other. But when I relax like this"—she softened, her whole body settling—"I can move the way water wants me to move. I can work with the water instead of against it." She began to hum softly:

Gentle, gentle
Softer wins
Fighting hard
Blocks learning in
Release, release
Let softness be
The key that opens
What you'll see!

"But what if I go underwater and can't get back up?"

"That's why we practice here in the shallow end, where you can always touch the bottom and stand up whenever you want. I'm right here beside you—close enough to touch. Mr. James is watching

from the lifeguard chair. Your mom is sitting right there on the bench. You're not alone, and you're not in danger. We've created a safe space so you can practice something that feels scary."

Cassie looked around. Miss Rosa was inches away, close enough that she could smell her coconut sunscreen. The lifeguard was watching, alert and ready. Her feet were planted firmly on the pool floor. Mom was visible through the fence, waving.

"Now, here's a trick for when you put your face in," Miss Rosa continued. "Hum a little tune. Like this: hmmmm." The humming sound vibrated in her throat. "The humming keeps water from going up your nose because air is coming out. Want to practice above water first?"

They hummed together—silly songs, TV show themes, random notes. It felt less scary above water.

"Now I'm going to show you something," Miss Rosa said. "Watch me." She took a breath, started humming, and dipped just her face in for one second. Came back up. "See? One second. That's all. And I could stand up any time I wanted."

"But you're a teacher. You're not scared."

"I wasn't always a teacher. When I was seven—your age—I was terrified of water. Absolutely terrified. I wouldn't even take baths, only showers. My mom had to bribe me with ice cream to come to my first lesson."

"Really?" Cassie couldn't imagine confident, graceful Miss Rosa being afraid of anything.

"Really. And you know what I learned? The fear doesn't go away by avoiding the water. It goes away by doing the scary thing in small pieces, in a safe place, with people you trust nearby. The fear gets smaller every time you prove to yourself that you're okay."

Cassie's heart pounded against her ribs like it was trying to escape. "I don't know if I can."

"You don't have to. There's no pressure. But if you want to try—just one second, just your face, just this once—I'll be right here. My hand will be on your back. You can stand up the instant you want to."

Cassie looked at the water. At Miss Rosa's calm, patient face. At her own hands, clenched into tight fists.

She consciously released her fingers, let her shoulders drop, tried to breathe normally instead of holding her breath.

"Okay," she whispered. "Just one second."

"Just one second. Take a breath. Start humming. Dip in. Come back up whenever you want."

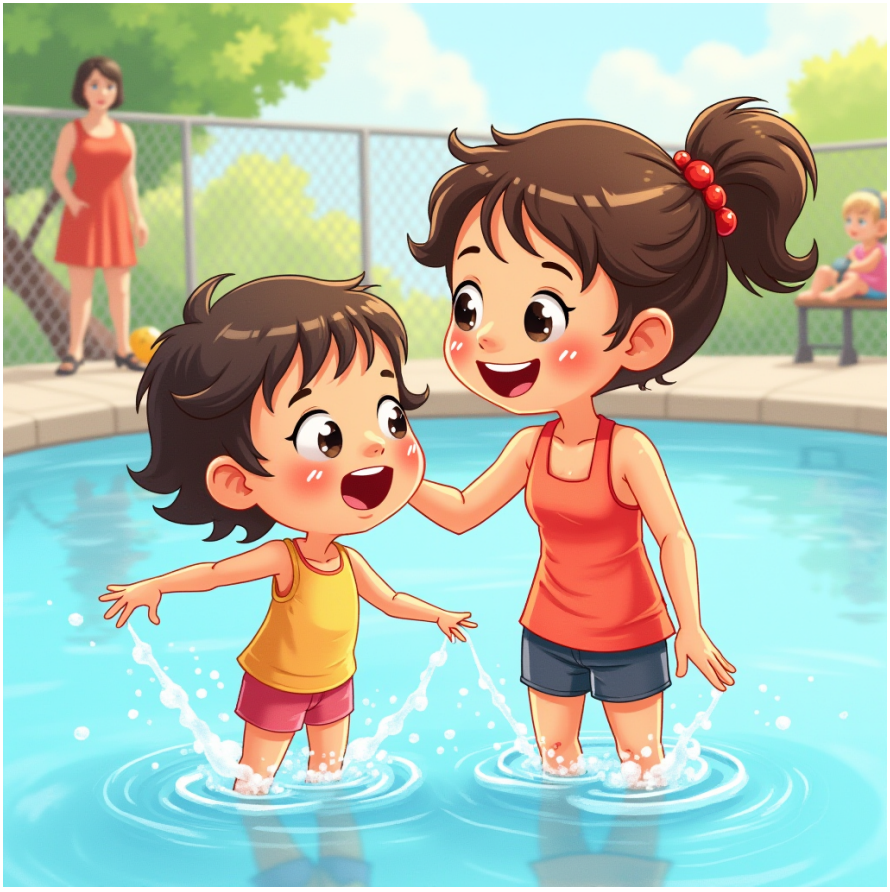
Cassie breathed in. Started humming "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." Felt Miss Rosa's warm hand

on her back.

She bent forward and put her face in the water.

Cool. Muffled. Humming buzzing in her ears. Feet solid on the pool floor. Miss Rosa's hand steady on her back.

She came up gasping.



*I did it!" Cassie gasped with joy—her face had gone underwater!*

"I DID IT!" Water streamed down her face. "I actually did it!"

"You did! How did it feel?"

"Scary at first. Really scary. But then..." Cassie paused, searching for words. "Then I noticed I wasn't sinking. My feet were still on the floor. You were still there. And I stopped clenching so hard and it was... easier. Like when I stopped fighting, my body could actually feel what was happening."

"That's exactly it. You let go of fighting, and your body could finally learn. Fighting blocks learning. Softening allows it."

That night, Cassie could barely wait for dinner to finish so she could tell her parents what Miss Rosa had taught her.

"She said learning to swim is different from learning other things," Cassie explained, gesturing with her fork. "It's not about trying harder. It's about trying softer."

Mom set down her glass thoughtfully. "She's right, you know. That's true for a lot of important things in life."

"Like what?"

"Like learning to fall asleep. Remember when you were little and you'd try so hard to sleep that you'd stay awake for hours? The trying was the problem. You had to relax and let sleep come to you instead of chasing it."

Dad added, "Or making friends. You can't force someone to like you by trying really hard and controlling everything you say. You have to relax, be yourself, and let the connection happen naturally. Gripping too tightly pushes people away."

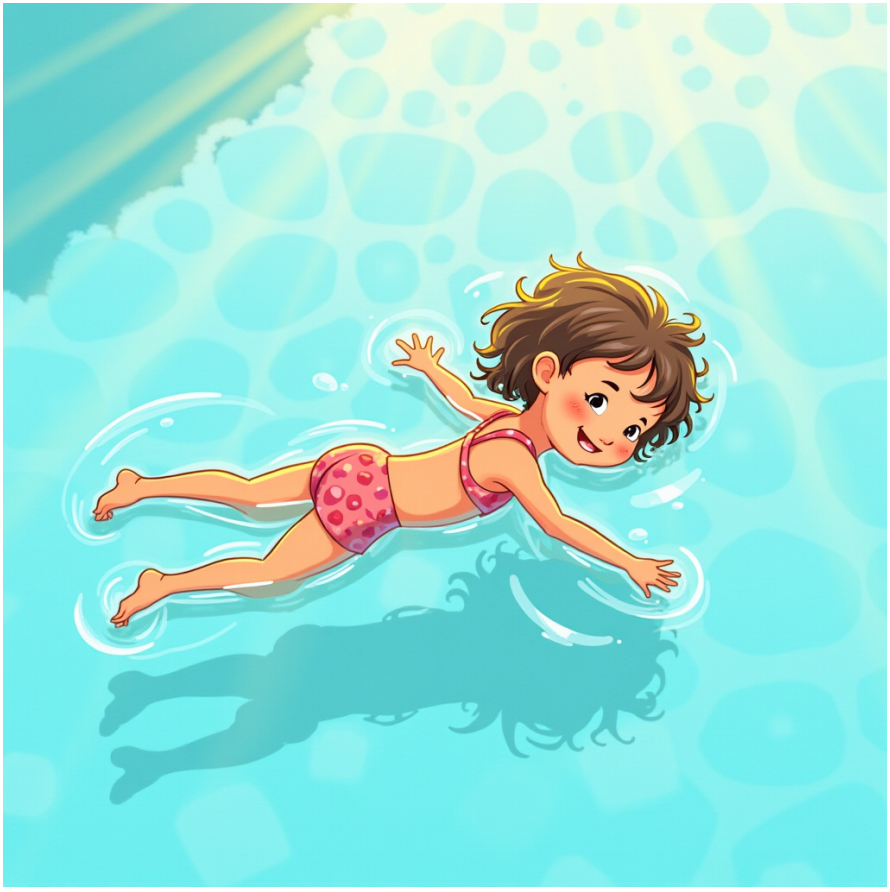
"Miss Rosa said something about creating a safe container," Cassie said, remembering. "She kept me in the shallow water where I could always stand up, and she stayed close, and the lifeguard was watching. So it was safe for me to practice letting go inside all that safety."

"That's really good teaching," Mom said, impressed. "She created safety around you so you could practice releasing control inside that safety. That's different from being reckless or careless. It's controlled practice of letting go."

"So I'm not letting go of safety," Cassie said slowly, working it out. "I'm letting go of clenching. Inside a safe place."

"Exactly. The shallow water stays. The instructor beside you stays. The lifeguard watching stays. What goes is the tight muscles, the held breath, the fighting against yourself. Those things just get in the way."

At her fourth lesson, Cassie put her face in the water seven times. At her fifth, fifteen times, and she held it under for three whole seconds. At her sixth, she tried letting her feet float up while Miss Rosa held her, and even though every instinct screamed to put her feet down, she softened and floated for just a moment.



*Cassie floats peacefully—soft and trusting instead of tight and afraid.*

Each time, she practiced the same thing: releasing the clench, softening the grip, trusting the support around her while letting go of the need to control everything inside.

It wasn't about being careless. It was about learning that sometimes—just sometimes—the way forward was to try softer, not harder.

To open instead of close.

To trust instead of control.

To soften into the learning instead of fighting against it.

**What Cassie Learned:**

✓ Sometimes trying softer works better than trying harder
✓ You can practice letting go inside a safe space
✓ Fighting blocks learning; softening allows it
✓ Safety comes from support around you, not tension inside you

**Important Pool Safety Note:**

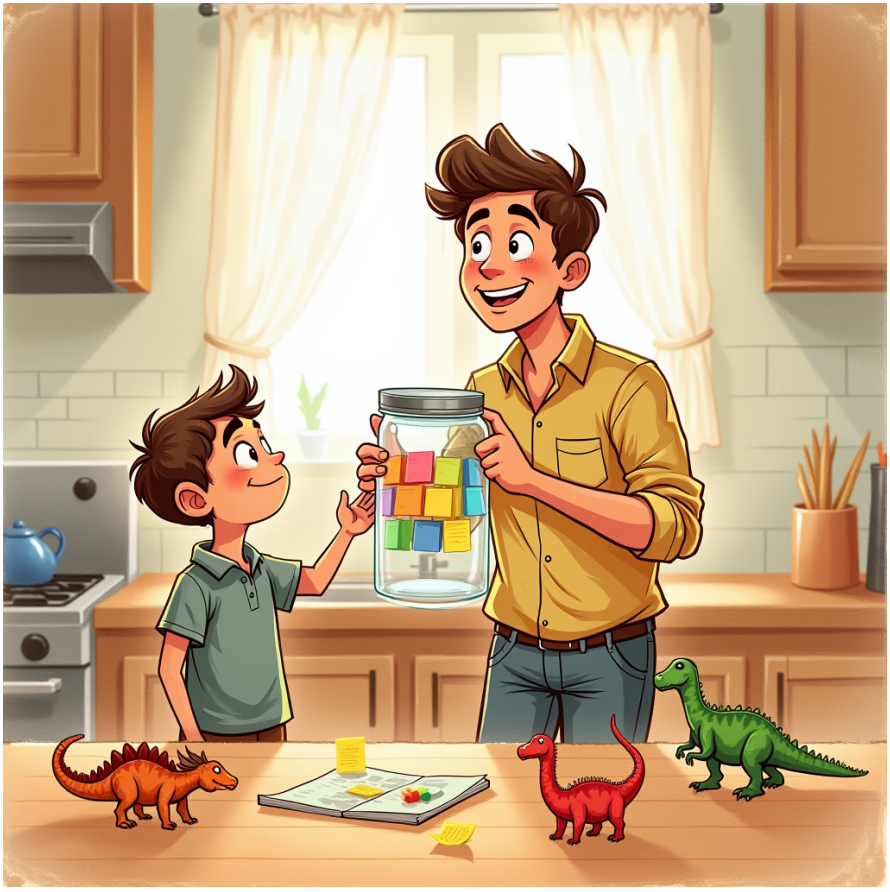
Remember: Cassie only practiced in the shallow end with a trained instructor and lifeguard present. Never swim alone, and always make sure a

grown-up is watching!

## Chapter 5: The Question Jar

Dad came home from work one Thursday with a large glass jar—the kind that once held pickles but now smelled of soap and possibility—and a thick pad of rainbow sticky notes.

"What's that for?" Caleb asked, abandoning his dinosaur army mid-battle.



*Dad brings home a special jar and rainbow sticky notes for family questions!*

"This," Dad announced, setting the jar on the kitchen table with ceremony, "is our new family Question Jar. Every time any of us has a question we don't know the answer to, we write it down and

put it in here."

"Why?" Cassie looked up from her homework, skeptical.

"Because I've noticed something about our family—about our whole culture, really. When we don't know something, we sometimes feel embarrassed. We pretend we know, or we change the subject quickly, or we get frustrated and defensive. But not knowing things is actually wonderful—it means we have something new to discover. It means our minds can still grow."

Mom set down the wooden spoon she'd been using to stir spaghetti sauce. "We want to celebrate questions just as much as we celebrate answers. Maybe more. Questions are how our minds grow. Answers are just stopping points along the way." She started singing softly:

Questions, questions
Open doors wide
Make your curious
Brain come alive
Wonder and explore
Discover more and more
Growing, growing
That's what questions are for!

That evening after dinner, they started.

Caleb wrote (with Mom's help, his letters big and wobbly): *Why is the sky blue?*

Cassie wrote in her careful printing: *How do airplanes stay up?*

Mom wrote: *Why do some plants grow toward light and others don't?*

Dad wrote: *How do ants know where to find food and tell the other ants?*

They folded the sticky notes and dropped them into the jar, the soft *plunk* of each question like planting seeds.

"Now," Dad said, giving the jar a good shake so the notes tumbled and mixed, "every Sunday we'll pick one question, and we'll explore it together. We'll look things up, watch videos, ask people who might know, experiment if we can. The goal isn't to become experts. It's to stay curious and to practice learning together."

"What if we can't find the answer?" Caleb asked.

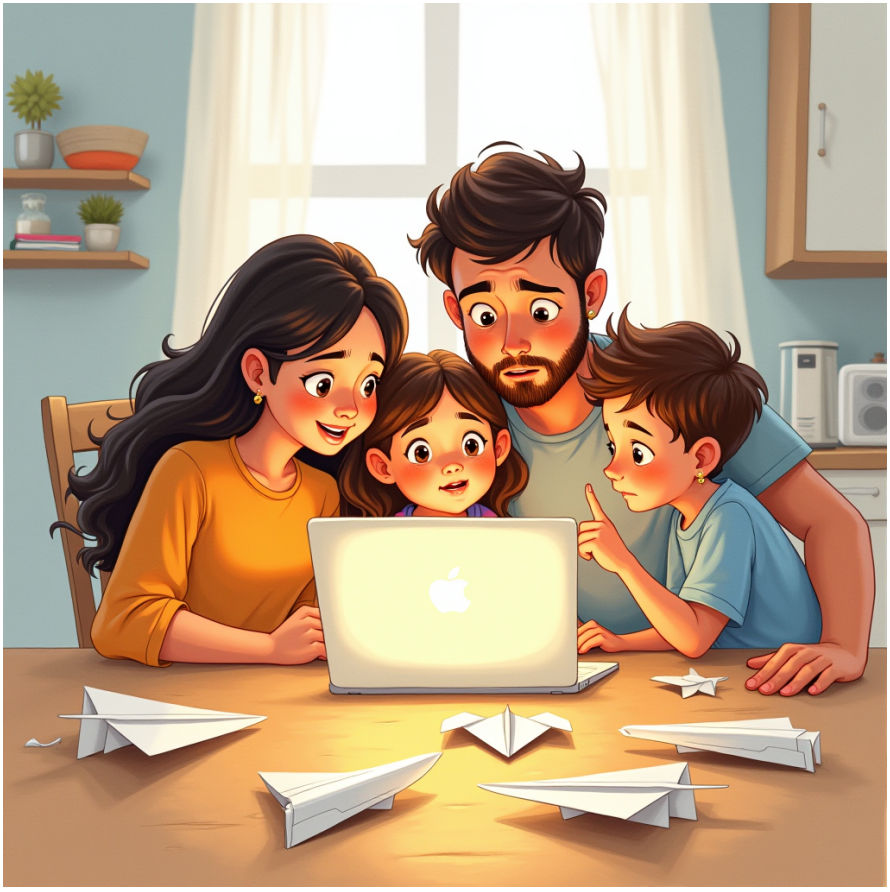
"Then that's interesting too! Some questions lead to more questions. Some questions don't have clear answers yet—scientists are still figuring them out.

That's part of the adventure."

That first Sunday, Cassie reached into the jar and pulled out: *How do airplanes stay up?*

"I actually thought I knew this," Dad admitted, reading the question. "But when I really think about it... I'm not sure I understand it well enough to explain it."

"Me neither," Mom said. "I know it has something to do with the wings and air, but the details are fuzzy. Should we figure it out together?"



*The whole family learns about flying together—even grown-ups don't know everything!*

They gathered around the laptop and found videos about lift, air pressure, wing shape, and thrust. They made paper airplanes and tested different designs—wide wings, narrow wings,

heavy nose, light nose. Cassie was surprised to watch her parents genuinely engaged, asking questions, admitting confusion.

"Wait," Mom said at one point, pausing the video. "I still don't understand how the curved wing creates lower pressure on top. That part isn't clicking. Can we watch it again?"

"Me neither," Dad said, frowning at the screen. "I thought faster air meant more pressure, but it's saying the opposite? This is more complicated than I thought!"

Cassie watched them rewind the video, discuss what they were seeing, get confused, try to draw it out, look up additional explanations. These were her grown-up parents who seemed to know everything—and they didn't. And they were completely okay with that, even seemed energized by not knowing.

"Dad," she said later that night when he came to tuck her in, "were you embarrassed when you didn't understand the airplane stuff?"

Dad sat on the edge of her bed, thinking. "A little bit, at first. There's this voice in my head that says I should know things, especially in front of my kids. Like I'm supposed to have all the answers because I'm the dad."

"But you don't?"

"Not even close. And I've learned that admitting what I don't know is one of the most powerful things I can do. It opens doors—to learning, to connection, to real conversations. Pretending to know keeps all those doors closed."

"But at school, everyone acts like not knowing is bad. The kids who know the answers fastest get the most stars and stickers and praise. Nobody celebrates the good questions."

"That's true, and it sends the wrong message. Knowing things is valuable—of course it is. But so is being willing to sit in the not-knowing and explore. Some of the smartest people in history were the ones who asked the most questions, not the ones who had all the answers. Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Leonardo da Vinci—they were professional questioners."

"So being curious is smarter than being certain?"

Dad smiled. "I think so. Certainty closes your mind. Curiosity opens it. And the world is so much bigger and stranger and more interesting than any one person can know."

The Question Jar became one of the family's favorite traditions. Week by week, it filled with sticky notes in four different handwriting styles:

*Why do we dream?*
*What makes thunder?*
*Where does the sun go at night? (Caleb suspected it*

*went to bed)*
*Why do I like some foods and hate others when they're both food?*
*How do caterpillars turn into butterflies without dying?*
*What came first, the chicken or the egg?*
*Why can't we remember being babies?*
*Do fish drink water?*
*What makes some sounds music and other sounds just noise?*

Each Sunday became an exploration. Sometimes they found answers that satisfied them. Sometimes they found answers that led to better questions. Sometimes they discovered that the answer was still being figured out by scientists, and that was exciting—maybe Cassie or Caleb would be the one to figure it out someday.

The most interesting part? The more questions they asked, the more they realized how much there was to learn. Instead of feeling overwhelming or discouraging, it felt like being surrounded by

wrapped presents waiting to be opened.

"I think my favorite thing about the Question Jar," Mom said one evening as they were pulling out the next question, "is that we don't have to know everything. We just have to be curious enough to keep asking. That takes so much pressure off."

"And we learn together," Caleb added, carefully sounding out the question he'd pulled: "Why... do... worms... come... out... when... it... rains?"


*The Question Jar overflows with family questions, and everyone reaches for another!*

"I don't know," Dad said cheerfully. "Let's find out!"

Cassie thought about how different this was from school, where not knowing felt like failing, where uncertainty was something to hide.

Here, in the safety of her family, questions were treasured.

Curiosity was celebrated.

Not knowing was just the exciting first page of a discovery story still being written.

**What the Family Learned:**

✓ Questions are more important than answers
✓ Not knowing something is the beginning of learning
✓ Adults don't know everything either
✓ Curiosity keeps your mind growing

## Chapter 6: The Recital and the Rain

For six weeks, Cassie practiced piano every single day.

Well. Most days.

Okay, some days she practiced with focus and determination. Some days she practiced while thinking about other things. And some days she banged through the piece with her fingers while her mind floated somewhere else entirely.

The piece was "Für Elise"—just the first section, but still the hardest thing she'd ever attempted. Her piano teacher, Mrs. Yamamoto, had warned her it was ambitious for a second-year student.

"But you can do hard things," Mrs. Yamamoto had said, her wrinkled hands demonstrating the

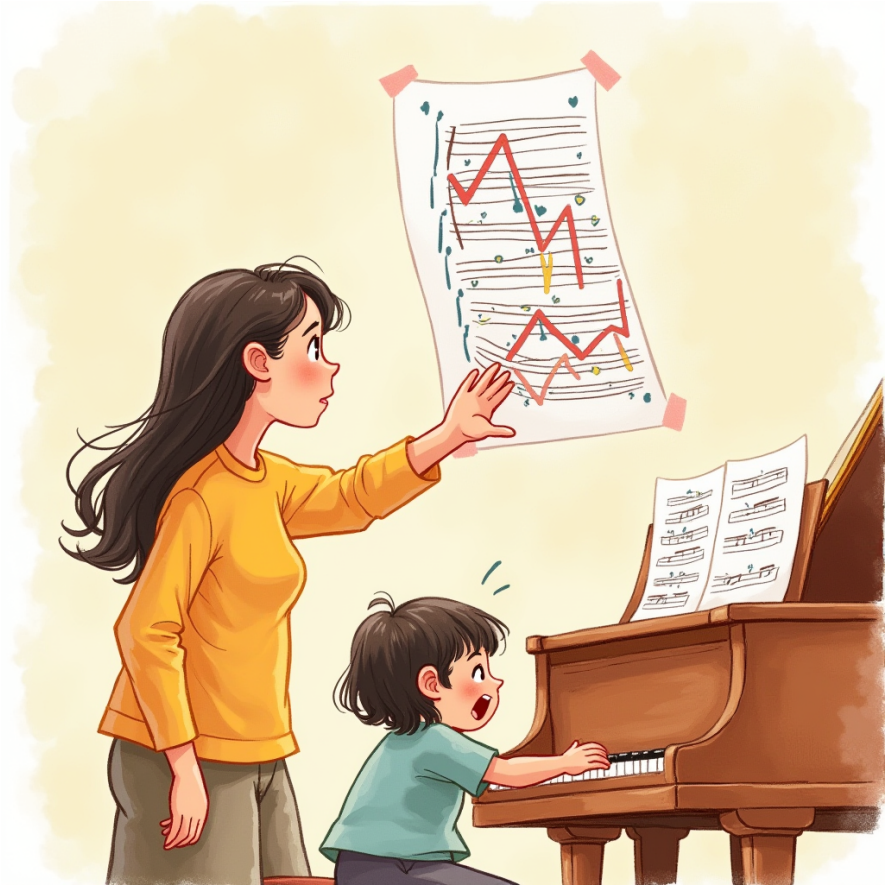
tricky fingering. "Hard things are how we grow."

Some days, Cassie's fingers remembered every note and the music flowed like water. Other days, they stumbled over the same measures she'd supposedly already learned, and she felt like she'd somehow gotten worse, like she was moving backward instead of forward.

"Why isn't it getting easier?" she asked Mom one particularly frustrating afternoon, after playing the same four measures wrong seventeen times. "I practice and practice, and then the next day it's like my fingers forgot everything!"

Mom sat down on the piano bench beside her. "Learning isn't always a straight line upward. Sometimes it's more like..." She grabbed a piece of paper and drew a messy scribble that generally moved from bottom-left to top-right, but with lots of loops and drops and sideways bits. "You go forward, then back, then sideways, then forward again. Some days you feel like you've mastered it.

Some days you feel like a beginner again. But if you zoom out and look at the whole thing"—she traced the general upward direction—"you can see you are improving. The backward bits are part of the process, not signs that you're failing."



*Mom shows Cassie that learning moves forward, even when it zigzags backward.*

Then Mom began to chant, her voice rhythmic and encouraging:

Practice days
Some great, some rough
Forward, backward
Smooth and tough
Stumbles come
Progress too
Zigzag learning
Carries you through!

"It doesn't feel like that when I'm in it."

"I know. When you're in the middle of the messy part, it just feels messy. You can't see the bigger picture. That's why it helps to record yourself sometimes, or to remember what this piece sounded like six weeks ago when you first tried it."

The week before the recital, Mrs. Yamamoto had Cassie play the piece all the way through.

It was... okay. Not perfect. A few stumbles. Some parts smoother than others. But complete.

"Good," Mrs. Yamamoto said. "Now, for the recital, I want you to remember something: music is not about perfection. It's about communication. You're sharing something beautiful with people you care about. That's what matters—not whether every note is exactly right."

The night before the recital, Cassie lay in bed wide awake, staring at the glow-in-the-dark stars on her ceiling. Her stomach felt like she'd swallowed a jar of butterflies. What if she forgot the notes? What if her mind went completely blank? What if everyone laughed?

"Dad?" she called out softly. "I can't sleep."

Dad appeared in the doorway, backlit by the hallway light. "Big day tomorrow. Nervous?"

"Really, really nervous. What if I make a mistake in front of everyone?"

Dad came and sat on the edge of her bed, the mattress dipping under his weight. "You might make a mistake. Actually, you probably will—most performers make small mistakes. The audience usually doesn't even notice them."

"But I'll notice."

"Maybe. And then you'll keep playing, because that's what musicians do. That's what resilience is—not avoiding the hard things or being perfect at them, but moving through them even when they're difficult. A mistake in a recital isn't the end of the story. It's just a sentence in the middle that makes the story more interesting."

"What if I freeze up completely? What if I forget where I am and can't keep playing?"

Dad was quiet for a moment, really considering her fear instead of just dismissing it. "That would be hard. And scary. And if it happens, you'll get through it—you'll either find your place again, or you'll start over, or Mrs. Yamamoto will help you. None of those things would be the end of the world, even though they'd feel embarrassing in the moment."

"That doesn't make me feel better."

"I know. But Cassie, do you remember why you wanted to learn this piece?"

Cassie had to think back, past all the recent stress and practicing and worry. "Because... when I first heard it, I thought it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard. Like magic made into sound. And I thought, 'I want to make that magic.' And I wanted to surprise Grandma at the recital because

she told me it's her favorite piece and it reminds her of her mother playing it when she was little."

"So the recital isn't really about being perfect, is it? It's about sharing something beautiful with people you love, including yourself. It's about creating a moment, not executing flawlessly. Does that change how it feels?"

Cassie thought about that. About Grandma in the audience, maybe remembering her own mother. About making beauty instead of proving perfection.

"A little," she admitted. "It's still scary though."

"It's absolutely okay to be scared and to do it anyway. That's basically the definition of courage—doing something that matters even though you're afraid."

The next afternoon, the recital hall was full of families, the air humming with anticipation and the rustle of programs. Cassie sat in the fourth row, her

hands cold and clammy, her heart beating so hard she could feel it in her throat.

When Mrs. Yamamoto called her name, she walked to the piano on legs that felt like they belonged to someone else.

She sat on the bench. Adjusted her position. Put her hands on the keys.

Breathed.

The opening notes came—soft, delicate, the familiar beginning.

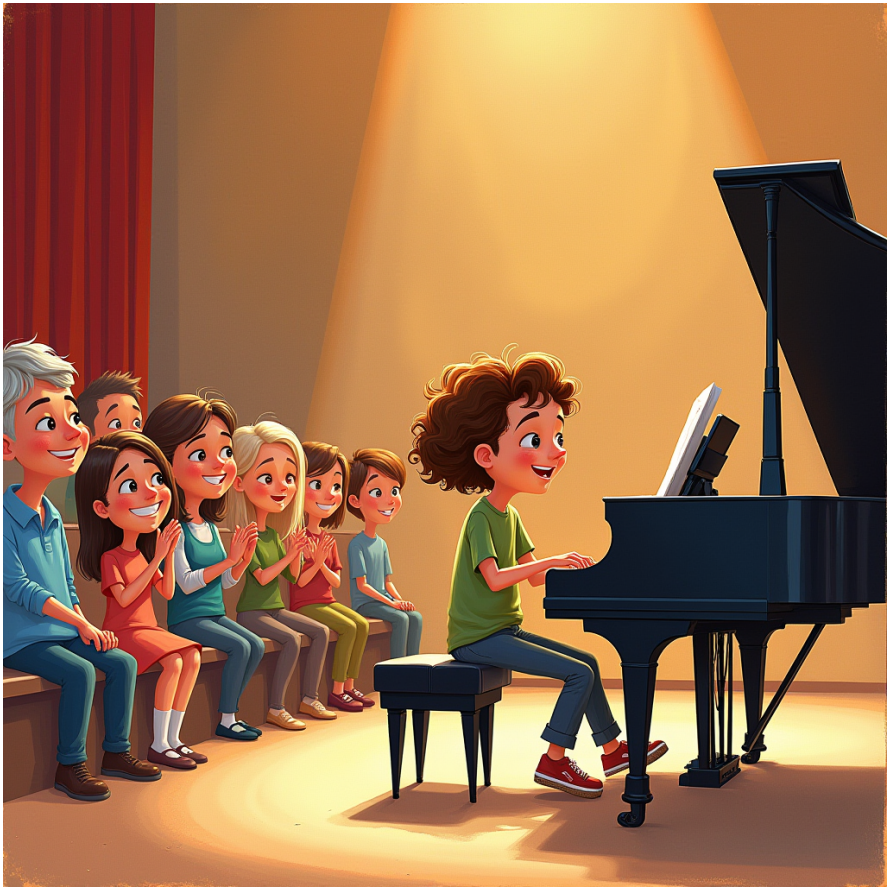
Her hands trembled slightly. In the second section, she played one note wrong—hit B instead of A—and her heart lurched. But her fingers kept going, found the right path again.

In the third section, there was a moment—just a split second—where her mind went completely blank and she couldn't remember what came next. Her hands froze.

Time stretched.

Then muscle memory kicked in and her fingers found the notes, and she was back in the flow.

She made it through to the end.



*Cassie's music fills the hall as her proud family watches and cheers.*

The final note hung in the air for a moment before the audience applauded. Cassie stood, bowed like Mrs. Yamamoto had taught her, and risked a glance at the audience.

Grandma was in the third row, wiping her eyes with a tissue, smiling so big her whole face glowed.

Mom and Dad were beaming.

Caleb was clapping enthusiastically and not even picking his nose, which was the highest compliment he could give.

Later, at home, Grandma held Cassie's hands in hers—soft, papery hands that had once played this same piece.

"That was beautiful, sweetheart," Grandma said, her voice thick with emotion. "I could feel how much you cared about every single note. It reminded me of my mother playing it when I was small, sitting beside her on the bench, thinking it was the most magical thing in the world."

"I made mistakes though."

"Did you? I didn't notice. I just heard a young girl sharing something precious with people she

loves. That's what music is—not perfection, but communication. Heart speaking to heart."

Later that evening, Cassie sat with Mom, reviewing how the recital had gone.

"I made two mistakes," Cassie said, holding up two fingers. "The wrong note, and the part where I forgot and had to stop for a second."

"Yes. How do you feel about them?"

Cassie thought carefully, examining her feelings like she was looking at interesting rocks. "I thought I'd feel terrible. Like a failure. But actually... I feel proud? I kept going even when I made the mistake. And when I forgot, I didn't run off the stage crying—I found my place and finished. The mistakes didn't ruin everything. They were just... moments."

"That's a really big realization," Mom said softly. "Mistakes aren't the opposite of success.

They're part of it. Every musician, every artist, every athlete, every person who does anything hard in public makes mistakes. What separates the people who give up from the people who succeed is how they relate to those mistakes."

"What do you mean?"

"You can see mistakes as evidence that you're not good enough, that you shouldn't be trying, that you're fundamentally flawed—that's a fixed mindset. Or you can see them as natural, temporary, and something to learn from—that's growth mindset. Same mistakes, completely different meaning depending on how you choose to look at them."

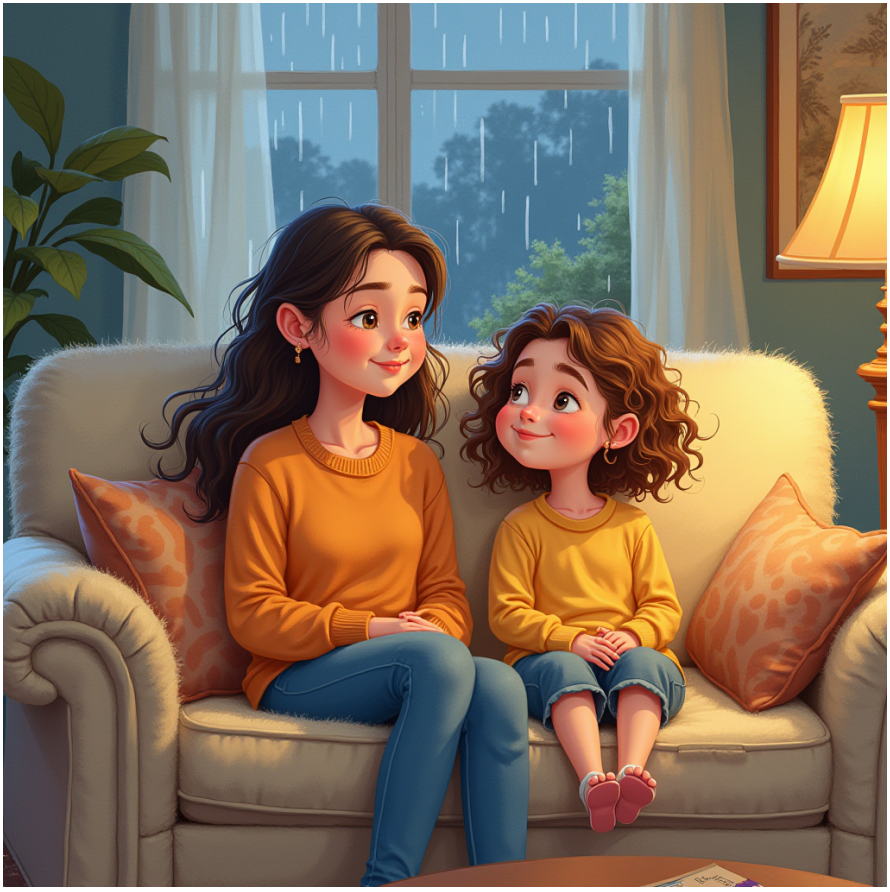
Cassie was quiet for a long time, processing this. "I think... I think I used to believe that if I made a mistake, it meant I was a mistake. Like the mistake proved something permanent and bad about me. But now I think it just means I'm human. And learning. And trying something hard. And that's

actually... brave?"

"That's not just brave, sweetheart. That's wisdom. Real wisdom."

Outside, rain began to fall, drumming softly on the roof. Cassie listened to it, thinking about how the recital hadn't gone perfectly, but it had gone beautifully.

And somehow, that was better.



*Sometimes the best talks happen on a rainy night, snuggled up safe at home.*

**What Cassie Learned:**

✓ Learning doesn't go in a straight line

✓ Mistakes during performance don't ruin the whole thing

✓ Courage means doing hard things even when you're scared
✓ Sharing something you care about matters more than being perfect

## Chapter 7: Caleb Teaches the Teacher

The late afternoon sun cast long shadows across the backyard when Caleb noticed Mr. Patterson struggling with his garden.

Mr. Patterson was old—older than Grandma, even—and he walked with a cane that had a carved duck head for a handle. He lived next door and mostly kept to himself, his garden usually immaculate with its neat rows of tomatoes and herbs.

But today, Mr. Patterson was standing in his garden looking frustrated, a tray of tomato seedlings on the ground beside him, one hand on his back.

"Whatcha doing?" Caleb called through the fence, abandoning his excavation of what might be

dinosaur bones (but was probably rocks).

Mr. Patterson turned slowly. "Trying to plant these tomatoes before the good planting weather passes. But my back isn't cooperating today. Getting old is its own kind of adventure—and not always the fun kind."

Caleb pressed his face against the fence slats, considering. "Do you want help? I'm really, really good at digging. Mom says I dig better than a dog."

Mr. Patterson looked surprised, his bushy white eyebrows rising. "Well now. That would be quite neighborly. If your mother doesn't mind?"

Caleb yelled toward the house: "MOM! CAN I HELP MR. PATTERSON PLANT TOMATOES?"

Mom appeared at the back door, assessed the situation, and nodded. "Half an hour, then you need to come in for bath time."

Caleb squeezed through the fence gate—it stuck halfway and he had to wiggle—and trotted over to Mr. Patterson with the confidence of someone who knew absolutely nothing about planting tomatoes but assumed it couldn't be that hard.

"Okay," Caleb said seriously, picking up the small garden shovel. "Where do they go?"

Mr. Patterson pointed to marked spots with small stakes. "About six inches deep, in these spots here. But here's the important part—you need to be gentle with the roots. They're fragile."

Caleb dug carefully, his tongue poking out with concentration. Mr. Patterson directed him—"A bit deeper," "That's good," "Now make a little mound at the bottom"—and together they got the first seedling in the ground.

"Why do they need a mound?" Caleb asked.

"So the roots have room to spread out. Think of it like this: the roots are like straws that drink water from the soil. If they're all squished together, they can't drink properly. But if they have room to spread, they can reach more water and nutrients."

"Plants drink through their roots? Like a straw?" Caleb's eyes went wide. "That's so cool! Is that how trees drink?"

"Exactly the same way. That huge oak tree in your yard? It's drinking through its roots right now, pulling water up through its trunk all the way to the leaves at the top."

They worked together for the next twenty minutes, Caleb digging and Mr. Patterson explaining. Caleb chattered the whole time—about his block towers, about learning to tie his shoes (still mostly unsuccessful), about how caterpillars turn into butterflies which seemed like actual magic.

Mr. Patterson, who usually kept to himself, found himself smiling more than he had in weeks.

"You know," Mr. Patterson said as Caleb carefully patted soil around the fourth tomato plant, "you're my apprentice now. Do you know what that means?"

"No. Is it good?"

"Very good. It means you're learning from a master—someone who's been doing something a long time. Gardeners used to always have apprentices to pass their knowledge to."

Caleb glowed with pride. "I'm a 'prentice! Mom! I'm a 'PRENTICE!"

As they finished the last plant, Mr. Patterson bent down slowly and picked up a worm that had surfaced in the disturbed soil.

"Look at this fellow," he said, holding it gently in his palm. "Know what he does?"

"He's slimy and gross?"

Mr. Patterson chuckled. "He's slimy, yes. But not gross—he's one of a gardener's best friends. Worms tunnel through the soil, which lets air and water reach plant roots. And their castings—that's a polite word for their poop—makes the soil healthy and rich. Without worms, gardens wouldn't grow nearly as well."

"Worm poop makes plants grow?" Caleb was delighted by this information. "Wait until I tell Cassie!"

When Mom called Caleb in for bath time, he came home with dirt under every fingernail, a smudge on his nose, and approximately eight million things to share.

"Mom! Mr. Patterson taught me about roots! Did you know plants drink through their roots like straws? And he showed me a worm, and worms make the soil healthy with their tunnels and their

castings—that's a fancy word for poop! And I'm his 'prentice now, which means I'm learning from a master!"

"That's wonderful, honey," Mom said, trying to corral him toward the bathroom. "It sounds like you learned a lot."

"But Mom—wait—" Caleb stopped, struck by a thought. "Did I teach him anything? Or did he just teach me?"

Mom knelt down, immediately recognizing this as an Important Question. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he's a grown-up and he's really smart about gardens. What could I teach him? I don't know anything he doesn't know."

"Did you talk to him about anything?"

"Well... yeah. I told him about Brachiosaurus and how they were plant-eaters, not meat-eaters. And I showed him how to make a whistle with a

blade of grass—you fold it like this and blow—but he couldn't do it. He said his lips don't work like they used to and he'd forgotten that trick. He seemed kind of sad about it."

"So you taught him about dinosaurs," Mom said. "And you reminded him about grass whistles, which he'd forgotten. And you gave him company and enthusiasm and help when his back hurt. Those are all gifts you gave him."

Caleb looked stunned. "I taught a grown-up?"

"Absolutely. Learning isn't just something kids do from adults. It goes every direction—adults learn from kids, kids learn from adults, adults learn from other adults, kids learn from other kids. Everyone knows something that someone else doesn't know."

"Even you learn from me?"

"All the time. You remind me to be curious about small things—like yesterday when you spent twenty minutes watching that ant carry a crumb. You remind me to ask 'why' about everything. You remind me to be excited about simple things, like puddles and cardboard boxes. Adults sometimes forget how to do those things, and kids help us remember."

At dinner that night, Cassie asked about Mr. Patterson.

"He's really nice," Caleb said through a mouthful of rice. "He knows SO much about plants. But he said his hands shake now sometimes, and he can't dig like he used to, and it's hard to do his garden by himself. He seemed sad about it."

"Getting older is its own kind of challenge," Dad said thoughtfully. "Mr. Patterson is probably learning new things about his body and what it can and can't do—just like you're learning about yours."

"So he's still learning? Even though he's super old?"

"Learning never, ever stops. We just learn different things at different ages. When you're four, you're learning to tie your shoes and share toys and use the bathroom by yourself. When you're seven like Cassie, you're learning to ride bikes and play piano and do harder math. When you're a teenager, you're learning about friendship and responsibility and who you want to become. When you're an adult, you might be learning how to do your job better, or how to be a good parent, or how to handle disappointment. And when you're very old like Mr. Patterson, you might be learning how to keep doing the things you love when your body doesn't work the way it used to."

"So everybody is learning something," Cassie said slowly. "All the time. Forever."

"All the time, forever," Mom agreed. "And here's the beautiful part: everybody also has

something to teach. Mr. Patterson knows about gardens and patience and how to care for living things. Caleb knows about dinosaurs and enthusiasm and grass whistles. Cassie knows about music and persistence and bike riding. Your teacher knows about reading and math and how to help kids learn. Dad knows about cooking and fixing things and making people laugh. I know about stories and animals and asking good questions. We're all experts in something and beginners in something else, all at the same time."

"That's kind of nice," Cassie said, the idea settling over her like a warm blanket. "It means we need each other. None of us has everything."

"Exactly. We're all teachers and students at the same time. That's what makes a community work—that's what makes a family work. We share what we know with open hearts, and we receive what others know with open minds." Dad began to sing softly:

*Everyone knows*
*Something to share*
*Young teach old*
*Old teach young there*
*Back and forth*
*Learning flows free*
*We all teach*
*We all see!*

The next weekend, Caleb helped Mr. Patterson again. This time he brought a drawing he'd made—Mr. Patterson's garden with all the plants labeled in wobbly printing: TOMATOS (spelled wrong but with love), BASIL, ROSEMARY, and a big smiling worm labeled WORM FRIEND.

Mr. Patterson looked at it for a long time, his old eyes getting suspiciously shiny.

"Best gift I've gotten in years, young man," he said, his voice rough. "I'm going to hang this on my refrigerator where I can see it every day."

Caleb beamed, pride filling his chest like a balloon.

He was learning about roots and worms and patience and how plants grow.

But he was also learning something bigger: that connection happens when people share what they know with open hearts.

That teaching and learning flow both ways.

That *everyone*—**everyone**—has something precious to offer.

And that sometimes, a four-year-old covered in dirt can teach just as much as an elderly master

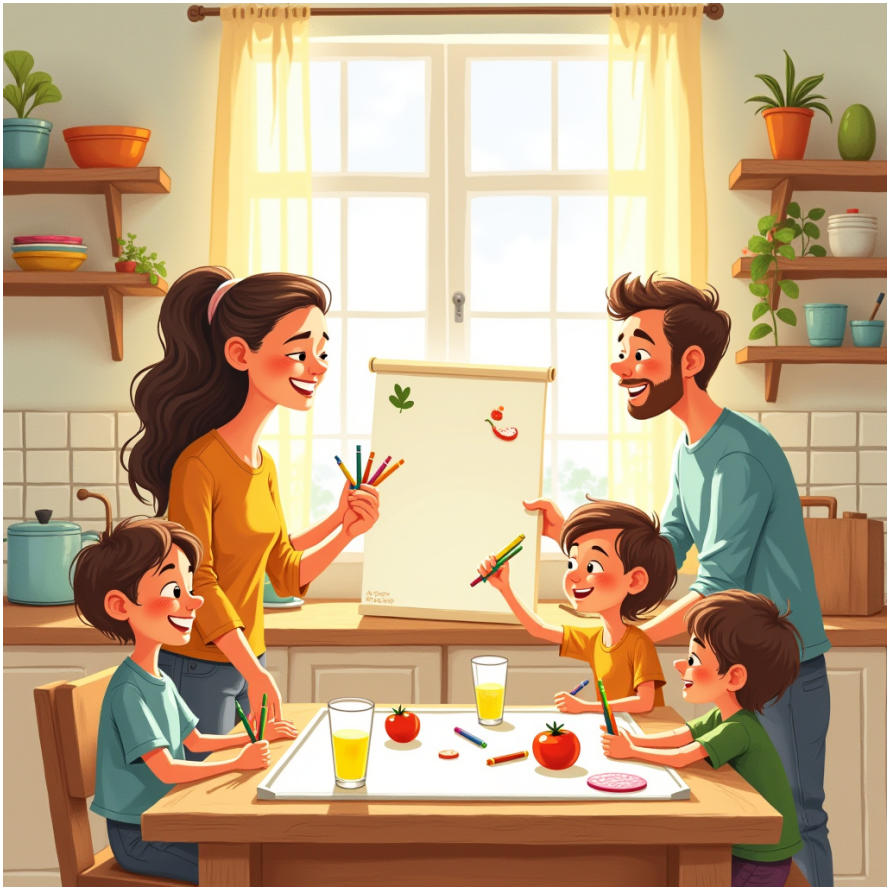
gardener.

### What Caleb Learned:

✓ Everyone is both a teacher and a student
✓ Adults learn from kids just like kids learn from adults
✓ You don't have to be an expert to teach someone something
✓ Sharing what you know with kindness is a gift

## Chapter 8: The Summer of Yet

On the last day of school, as summer stretched before them like an unexplored country, the family gathered around the kitchen table with lemonade and a large piece of poster board.



*The family gathers with lemonade to plan their Summer of Yet!*

"We're calling this our Summer of Yet," Mom announced, uncapping a set of colorful markers. "Everyone gets to pick something they can't do yet—something that feels just beyond their reach.

We'll work on them together, and at the end of summer, we'll see how far we've come. Not how perfect we've gotten—how far we've journeyed."

Cassie chose cartwheels. She could do forward rolls easily, but cartwheels? Her legs got confused halfway through and she'd collapse in a heap.

Caleb chose tying his shoes. He'd been using velcro forever, and the bunny ears method looked like ancient magic to him.

Mom chose playing ukulele. Her grandmother had played beautifully, and Mom wanted to feel connected to that memory, to make music with her hands the way Grandma had.

Dad chose speaking Spanish. Not fluently—just enough to order food and hold a basic conversation when they visited Mexico someday.

They made a chart on the poster board and hung it on the refrigerator with magnets shaped like

vegetables. Then they all chanted together, Dad leading:

This summer bright
We'll learn brand new
With patience strong
Practice through
Stumbles, tries
We'll open eyes
Yet helps us
Reach the skies!

**Week One** arrived with enthusiasm that could power a small city.

Cassie practiced cartwheels until she was dizzy, grass-stained, and convinced she was making progress. Caleb tangled his shoelaces into impossible knots that required adult intervention to untie. Mom's ukulele made sounds like an angry cat being swung by its tail. Dad's Spanish pronunciation made everyone giggle—his "rr" sounds came out like a motorboat.

**Week Two** brought the harsh reality of actual learning.

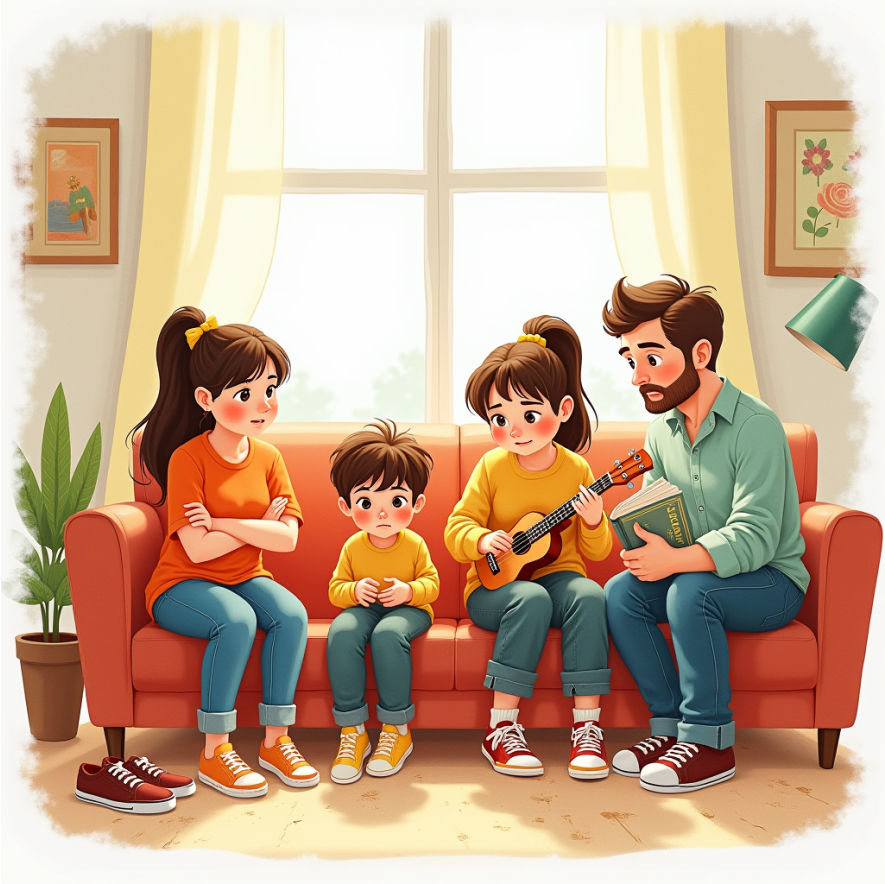
Cassie's cartwheels still looked like controlled crashes. Her legs went sideways instead of over. Her hands landed at weird angles. She'd watch YouTube videos of kids doing perfect cartwheels and feel like she'd never get there.

Caleb declared shoelaces "the worst invention ever made by humans" and threw his shoes across the room. Twice.

Mom's fingers hurt so much from pressing the ukulele strings that she wanted to quit. "This is harder than I thought," she admitted. "I imagined it would be fun and easy, like in my memories of watching Grandma. But it's painful and frustrating, and I feel like I'm not getting anywhere."

Dad couldn't remember which Spanish words were similar to English and which were false friends. He'd accidentally told the mirror "I'm embarrassed" (*estoy embarazada*) when he meant to say "I'm embarrassed" (*estoy avergonzado*), but the first one actually meant "I'm pregnant."

They called a family meeting in the living room.



*Learning is hard, but at least they're together in the messy middle.*

"I want to quit," Caleb said honestly. "Shoes are stupid."

"I thought I'd be better by now," Cassie admitted. "Those kids on YouTube learned cartwheels in like three days. I've been trying for two weeks."

"My fingers hurt all the time," Mom said, showing her fingertips where the strings had left painful grooves. "And I feel like I sound worse now than I did at the beginning."

"This is the messy middle," Dad said, though his voice carried frustration too. "Remember when we talked about this? The place between beginning and getting good—where most people quit because progress feels invisible and the joy has worn off but the skill hasn't arrived yet."

"What keeps people going in the messy middle?" Caleb asked.

Mom thought about it, rubbing her sore fingertips. "Remembering why we started helps. I wanted to learn ukulele not to perform or be

impressive, but because my grandmother played. When I hold this instrument, I feel connected to her. When I remember that, the sore fingers feel worth it—like I'm enduring something difficult for something that matters."

"And celebrating tiny progress instead of measuring yourself against the end goal," Dad added. "Yesterday I successfully ordered coffee in Spanish in my head—got all the words right, proper pronunciation. That's not nothing. That's one small step that didn't exist two weeks ago."

They decided to shift their focus. Instead of "am I good at this yet?" they'd ask "did I practice today?" and "did I learn one new thing?"

They made a new rule: every day, you had to name one tiny win. It didn't have to be impressive. It just had to be real.

Cassie's tiny wins: "I kept my arms straight today." "My hands landed in the right spot three

times." "I didn't give up even though I wanted to."

Caleb's tiny wins: "I made the first loop." "I didn't throw my shoes." "I asked Dad for help instead of having a meltdown."

Mom's tiny wins: "I practiced even though my fingers hurt." "I learned the C chord." "I could switch between C and G without looking."

Dad's tiny wins: "I learned ten new words." "I practiced pronunciation for five minutes." "I had a practice conversation with myself in the mirror."

**Week Five** brought something unexpected: actual progress.

Cassie's cartwheels weren't perfect—her legs bent, her form was messy—but her legs were going over her head. It looked like a cartwheel. A weird, wobbly cartwheel, but recognizable.

Caleb could tie a basic knot. The bunny ears still confused him, but he could make the laces cross

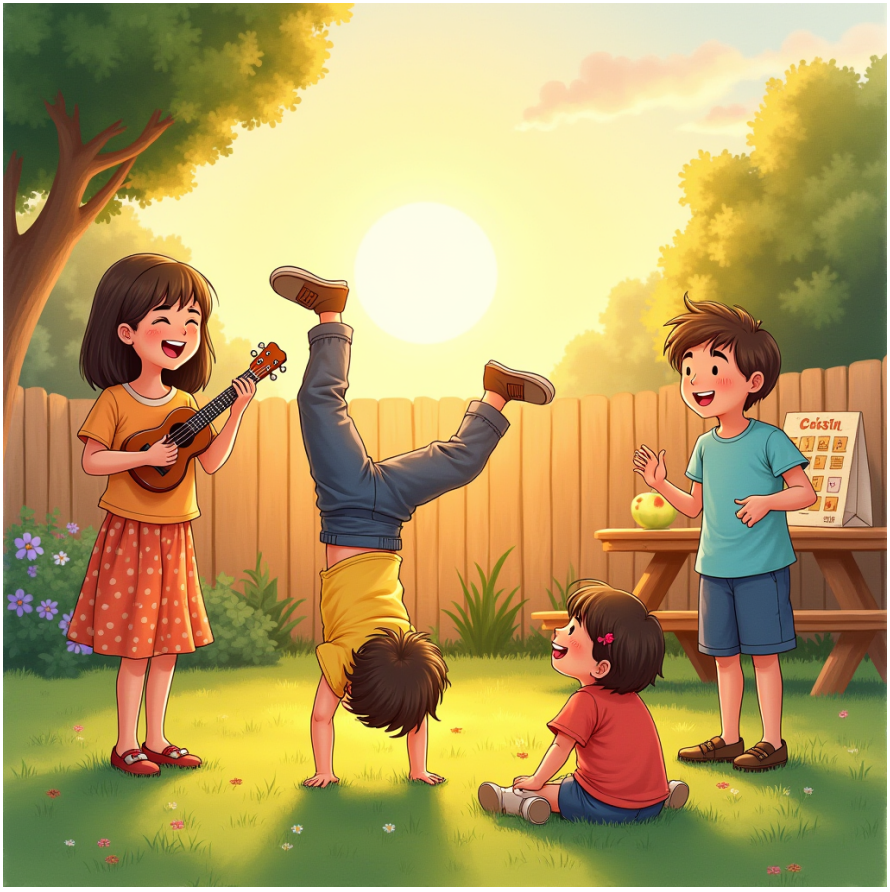
and pull tight.

Mom could play "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" slowly but recognizably. Real music came from the ukulele. Not beautiful yet, but real.

Dad could introduce himself, ask for directions, and order food in Spanish. When Mom quizzed him, he actually understood most of what she said.

### Week Eight—End of Summer:

The whole family gathered in the backyard for their "Summer of Yet Showcase."




*The whole family celebrates their summer of learning and growing together!*

Cassie did a cartwheel across the grass. Wobbly, bent legs, arms not quite straight—but her feet went over her head, and she landed on her feet instead of her face. The family erupted in applause.

Caleb tied his shoes. It took two and a half minutes and required enormous concentration—his tongue poked out, his face scrunched in focus—but he did it completely by himself. Both shoes. They weren't pretty bows, but they were tied.

Mom played "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" on the ukulele. She had to restart once, and some chord changes were clunky, but the melody was clear and sweet. Caleb clapped and swayed. Dad's eyes got misty.

Dad ordered their dinner at a Mexican restaurant entirely in Spanish—speaking to the waiter, understanding his questions, even making a joke that landed. The waiter smiled and complimented his pronunciation, and Dad understood the compliment without needing translation.

At their celebration dinner (tacos from the restaurant where Dad had successfully ordered), they reflected on what they'd learned.

"The thing that surprised me most," Mom said, carefully holding her taco so the filling didn't escape, "was how many times I wanted to quit. Not because it was too hard exactly, but because progress felt so painfully slow. I'd practice and practice and still sound terrible. I had to keep reminding myself that slow progress is still progress. That comparison with other people—or with my imagined timeline—was poisoning my experience."

"I learned that I'm not very patient," Caleb said with remarkable self-awareness for a four-year-old. "I want to be good at things right away. But you can't. You have to be bad first, then less bad, then okay, then good. And being patient with being bad is really, really hard. But is patience a skill too? Can you get better at patience?"

"Absolutely," Dad said. "And you just named something crucial. We don't just learn cartwheels and Spanish and ukulele. We learn patience, persistence, how to handle frustration, how to keep

going when we desperately want to stop, how to be gentle with ourselves when we're struggling. Those meta-skills—skills about learning itself—matter just as much as the surface skills. Maybe more."

Cassie looked at the chart on the refrigerator, now covered with check marks and notes and tiny daily wins accumulated over eight weeks. "I don't think I'll ever hear 'I can't' the same way again. Now when I hear it in my head, another voice immediately says, 'Yet.' Like they're two parts of the same sentence. I can't do cartwheels... yet. The yet makes the can't feel temporary instead of permanent."

"That voice will serve you your whole life," Mom said softly. "Because learning never ends, sweetheart. There will always be new yets waiting for you—in school, in work, in relationships, in parenting someday if you choose that. Life is basically an endless series of 'I can't yet' moments that become 'I can' moments if you're willing to stay in the messy middle long enough."

The sun set orange and pink behind the trees. Moths began their evening dance around the porch light. The remains of dinner sat on plates—evidence of a meal shared, a summer celebrated, a family that had chosen to learn together.

"To yet," Dad said, raising his glass of lemonade.

"To yet," they chorused, glasses clinking.

Such a small word.

Such an enormous difference.

**What the Family Learned:**

✓ The "messy middle" is where most people quit
✓ Tiny daily progress adds up over time
✓ Comparing yourself to others steals your joy
✓ Learning skills teaches you about learning itself

## Chapter 9: The Gift of Yet

The last week of summer arrived too quickly, sticky and golden and tinged with the bittersweet knowledge that school would start soon.

Cassie was at the park on Tuesday afternoon, practicing cartwheels on the grassy area near the playground, when she noticed a girl about her age standing at the edge of the play structure, looking uncomfortable and uncertain.

New, Cassie thought immediately. The girl had that careful watchfulness of someone trying to figure out where they fit.

"Hi," Cassie said, walking over with the unselfconscious friendliness of a seven-year-old who'd recently learned that connection mattered more than perfection. "I'm Cassie."

"I'm Nadia." The girl's voice was quiet, cautious. "We just moved here. Like, three days ago."

"Want to play?"

They climbed on the jungle gym together, Cassie pointing out the best parts—the twisted slide that made you dizzy, the monkey bars that were actually really hard but satisfying, the spot where you could see three streets from the top platform.

When they reached the monkey bars, Nadia stopped abruptly.

"I can't do those," she said, backing away, her expression closing off.

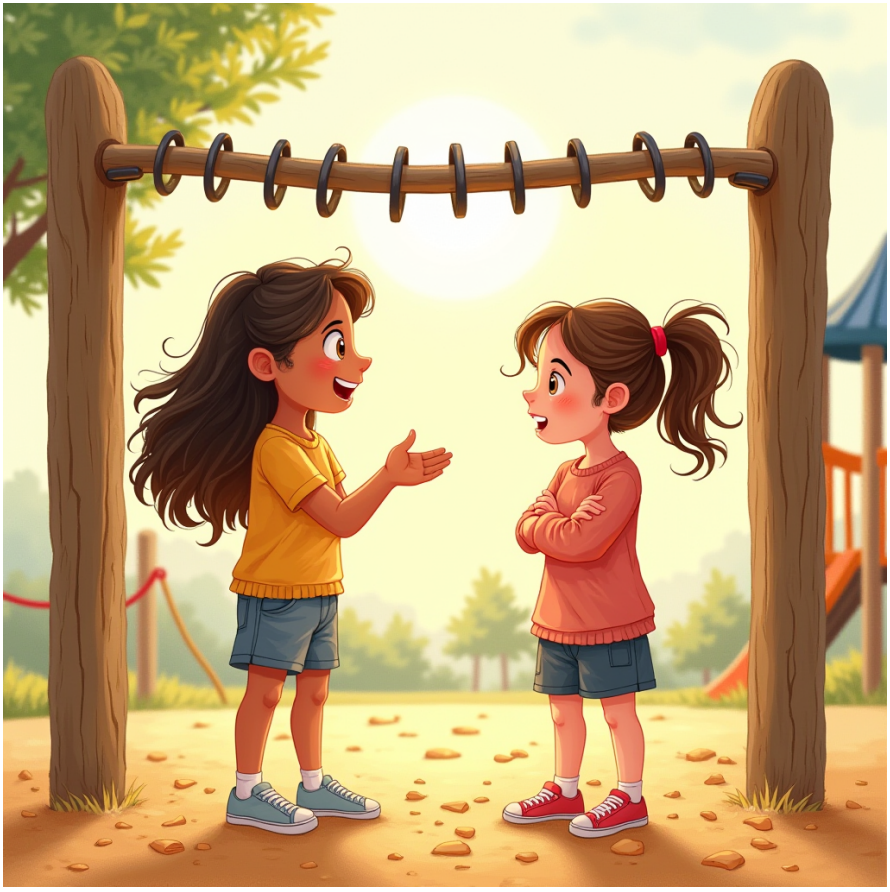
Cassie almost said "They're easy!" or "Just try!"—the same unhelpful things people had said to her about swimming and biking. But she caught herself, remembering how those words had made her feel: small and incapable and like something was wrong with her for finding the "easy" thing

hard.

She remembered being terrified of the fourth monkey bar, how her hands would sweat and she'd freeze. She remembered the sick feeling of watching other kids swing across effortlessly while she couldn't make it past three bars.

"I couldn't do them either, at first," Cassie said instead, choosing her words carefully. "Actually, for a really long time. Want me to tell you what helped me?"

Nadia looked uncertain, like she was deciding whether to trust this. "Okay..."



*Cassie shares a secret about being brave with her new friend.*

Cassie took a breath and whispered:

*Fear means*
*You care so much*
*Scared means*
*It matters, such*
*Brave hearts*
*Beat fast and true*
*Courage grows*
*Inside of you!*

"My dad told me something important: being scared doesn't mean you can't do it. It just means you care about trying, that it matters to you. If you didn't care at all, you wouldn't be scared. The fear means you want to succeed."

Nadia considered this.

"And my swimming teacher said sometimes you have to let go of needing to control everything perfectly and just... trust the process. Trust that your body can learn, even if it feels impossible right now. Trust that being bad at something is the first step to being good at it."

"That's weird advice," Nadia said, but she smiled a little.

"I know, right? But it kind of worked." Cassie demonstrated, swinging across the monkey bars. She made it all the way—not gracefully, but completely. "I used to freeze at the fourth bar. Every single time. But I kept trying, and I let myself be bad at it, and eventually my body figured it out."

Nadia stepped closer to the bars, hesitant but curious. She reached up and grabbed the first one. She hung there for a moment, testing her grip, then carefully reached for the second bar.

Her hand caught it, held for a second, then slipped. She dropped to the ground—only about two feet, landing on wood chips.

"I only made it one bar," she said, disappointment heavy in her voice.

"One bar is one bar more than zero bars," Cassie said. She remembered Mom saying this during the Summer of Yet, when Caleb had gotten frustrated. "That's how I think about it now. Every tiny bit of progress counts. Tomorrow you might make it to two bars. Or you might still make it to one. Both of those are completely okay. You're not competing with anyone except who you were yesterday."

Nadia looked at her with surprise, like this was a completely new way of thinking. "You're nice. Most kids just say 'it's easy' or 'just do it' and that makes me feel way worse, like I'm stupid for not being able to do the easy thing."

"It's not easy," Cassie said firmly. "It's hard. Really hard. Your hands hurt, you're scared of falling, you don't know if you can trust your grip. But you can't do it yet. That's different from never. That's different from can't. Yet means it's coming, you're just not there today."

They played until the sun started setting, painting the sky in sherbet colors. They tried the monkey bars twice more—Nadia made it to two bars on her last attempt and lit up like she'd won an Olympic medal.

Before Nadia's mom called her to leave, she turned to Cassie with a shy smile.

"Thanks for the 'yet' thing. I'm going to try to remember it."

"It helps," Cassie said. "It really does. When school starts next week, if you see me and I look frustrated, remind me about it too, okay? Sometimes I forget."

Walking home in the long evening shadows, Cassie felt warm inside. Not proud exactly—more like purposeful. She'd shared something that might help someone else see themselves differently.

That night at dinner, she told her family about Nadia.

"You gave her a gift," Mom said, her voice soft. "The gift of yet. It doesn't cost you anything—you don't lose it by giving it away. But it can change someone's whole way of seeing themselves. It can change their story."

"Do you think she'll remember it?"

"Maybe. Maybe she'll remember it for years and it'll help her through hard things. Maybe she'll forget by tomorrow and need to be reminded again next week. Both of those are okay. That's how learning works for everyone—we remember, we forget, we get reminded, we internalize, we forget again, we relearn. It's messy and non-linear and

that's normal."

Dad added, "Here's something interesting: teaching someone about growth mindset is one of the best ways to strengthen your own understanding of it. When you have to explain something to someone else, you have to clarify it in your own mind first. You have to really understand it yourself."

Cassie thought about all the things she'd learned this summer, and really, this whole year since that day with the crumpled math test.

She'd learned that bike riding and scootering were different, and being good at one didn't automatically make you good at the other. That assumptions could block learning. That staying open and curious mattered more than being certain.

She'd learned that mistakes were teachers, not judgments. That every fallen tower and crashed bike and wrong note was information, not proof of

failure.

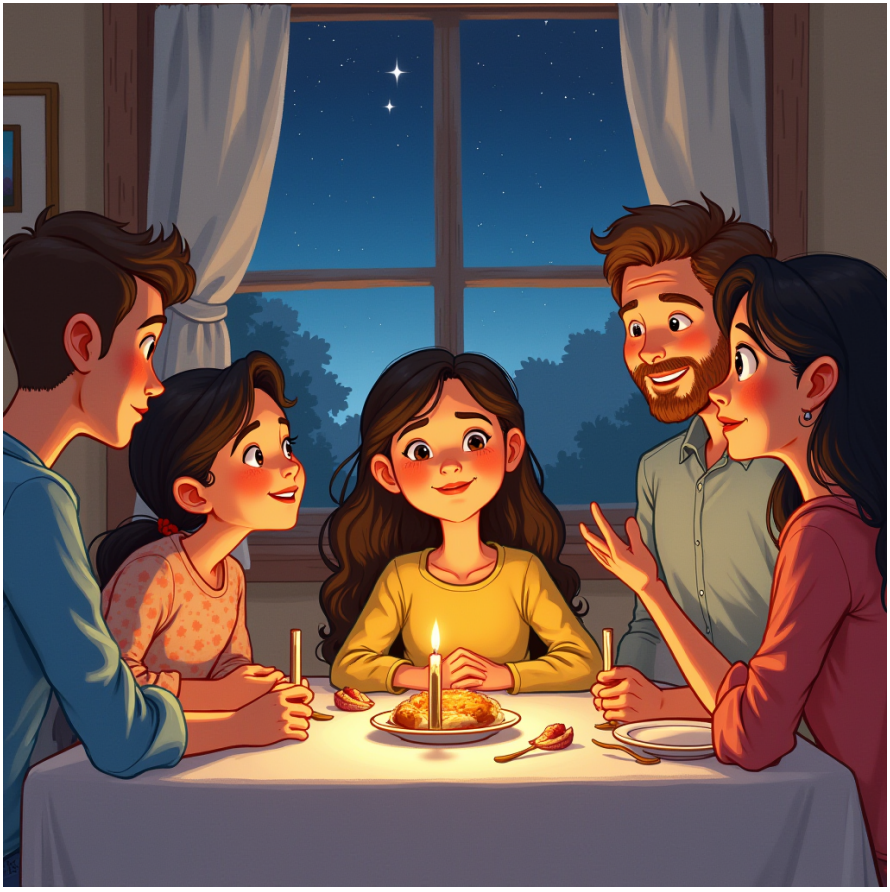
She'd learned that sometimes trying softer worked better than trying harder. That you could practice letting go inside a container of safety.

She'd learned that questions were more valuable than answers. That curiosity kept your mind growing while certainty closed it off.

She'd learned that everyone—everyone—was both a teacher and a student. That learning never stopped, just changed shape.

She'd learned that the messy middle was where most people quit, but also where the real transformation happened.

But mostly, she'd learned that *yet* changed everything.



*Cassie shares her big discovery with her family under the starry sky.*

"I think," Cassie said slowly, trying to find words for something she felt but couldn't quite see clearly yet, "that growth mindset isn't just about getting better at stuff. Like, it's not just about

learning to ride bikes or play piano or do math. It's about... becoming a different kind of person? More open. More curious. Less afraid of hard things. More willing to be bad at something before you're good at it."

Her parents exchanged one of those looks—the kind that said *our child just understood something important*.

"Cassie," Dad said, his voice warm and proud, "that might be the wisest thing I've heard all summer. Maybe all year."

"It's true though, right?" Cassie pressed. "When you believe you can learn and grow and change, you become braver. Because you're not trying to protect this fixed idea of who you are. You can try new things because you know that even if you're terrible at first, that's not the end of the story."

"That's exactly right," Mom said. "Dr. Dweck—the scientist who discovered a lot of

this—she'd say that's the whole point. Growth mindset isn't really about achievement or success in the traditional sense. It's about becoming someone who can move through challenges without being destroyed by them. Someone who sees life as an adventure of learning rather than a test to pass or fail."

Outside, crickets began their evening song. The first stars appeared in the deepening blue sky.

Cassie thought about Nadia at the monkey bars, about the small gift of one word that might change how she saw herself.

She thought about next week when school would start—third grade, with harder math and more reading and new challenges.

She thought about all the things she couldn't do yet: division, cursive writing, swimming across the deep end, skateboarding, making pancakes without help.

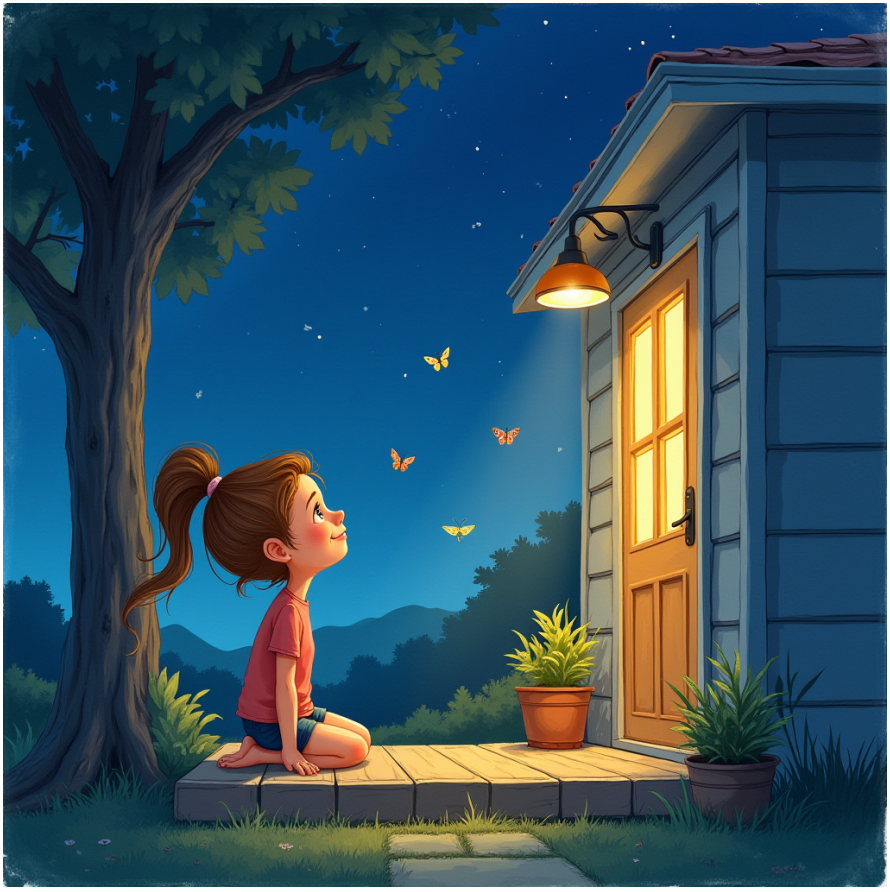
But the *yet* made all the difference.

It took "I can't" and opened it up like a door, like a window, like a path leading somewhere she couldn't see yet but could walk toward.

"Thanks, Dad," she said suddenly. "For telling me about Grandma Ruth and the horses. For asking me if I couldn't or if I couldn't yet. That one question kind of changed everything."

Dad's eyes got suspiciously shiny. "You're welcome, sweetheart. But you did the hard part—you took that question and let it change how you see yourself. That was all you."

The family sat together as evening deepened into night, moths dancing around the porch light, the summer's lessons settling into their bones like seeds that would grow into next year's understanding.



*Cassie gazed at the stars, dreaming of all she could still become.*

Cassie whispered the final verse of Grandma Ruth's poem one more time, letting it become part of her:

*Can't builds walls*
*Yet opens doors*
*My story's middle*
*Not the close*
*Keep growing, learning*
*Never done*
*My journey's just*
*Begun, begun.*

Learning never ended.

Growth never stopped.

And *yet*—that small, powerful word—would always be there, waiting to transform every "I can't" into a door standing open.

**What Cassie Learned (and Shared):**

✓ You can help others by sharing what you've learned
✓ Teaching something makes your own understanding stronger
✓ Growth mindset changes who you are, not just what you can do
✓ The gift of "yet" costs nothing but can change everything

Dear Reader,

The ideas in this story are inspired by real scientific research from Dr. Carol Dweck and many other scientists who study how our brains work and how people learn.

Here's what they've discovered, and here's what's true:

**Your brain physically changes when you learn new things.** It's not a metaphor—it's real. Scientists can actually see it happen. Your brain

grows new connections between neurons (brain cells) when you practice and struggle and try again. Every time you work hard at something, you're literally building your brain. It's like a muscle that gets stronger with exercise.

**Mistakes are essential to learning.** They're not signs of failure or proof that something is wrong with you. They're information. Data. Clues. The best learners in the world don't avoid mistakes—they pay careful attention to them because mistakes show exactly what needs to be learned next.

**Asking for help makes you smarter, not weaker.** The most successful people in the world—scientists, athletes, artists, business leaders—all have coaches, mentors, teachers, and teams. They know that learning with other people is faster and richer than learning alone. Asking for help isn't admitting weakness; it's showing wisdom.

**Everyone is both a teacher and a student, always.** You have knowledge and perspectives that others need, and they have knowledge and perspectives you need. Learning is an exchange, a gift we give each other. It never flows in just one direction.

**Sometimes learning means trying softer instead of harder.** Not everything responds to more effort and more control. Sometimes you need to relax, trust the process, and allow learning to happen. This is especially true for things that involve your whole body or your emotions.

**Yet is a magic word.** Three letters that completely change the meaning of "I can't." It takes a closed door and opens it. It reminds you that today isn't forever, that you're in the middle of your story, not at the end.

**The messy middle is real.** When you're learning something new, there's usually a period where you're not a beginner anymore but you're not

good yet either. It's frustrating and uncomfortable and that's where most people quit. But that's also where the real learning happens. If you can stay in the messy middle without giving up, that's where transformation occurs.

You are capable of amazing growth—not because everything will be easy, but because you can learn to work with hard things instead of against them.

Your brain is an incredible gift that keeps growing your entire life.

Your mistakes are your teachers.

Your questions are more valuable than your answers.

And that small voice that says "I can't"?

Add three letters—*yet*—and watch what happens.

## A Note About Families:

You might have noticed that Cassie's family talks a lot about feelings, asks questions, and is very patient when things are hard. Not all families work this way, and that's okay. Some families are quieter. Some are busier. Some have different challenges. If your family doesn't talk like this, it doesn't mean anything is wrong with you or them. The important thing is finding people who believe in you—that might be a teacher, a friend's parent, a coach, a neighbor like Mr. Patterson, or someone else who sees your potential. Everyone deserves to have at least one person who reminds them about "yet."

Keep being curious.
Keep asking questions.
Keep trying things that scare you a little.
Keep being bad at things before you're good at them.
Keep staying open even when you think you know.

Because you're not done growing.

None of us are.

That's the beautiful part.

### Your Brain is Amazing:

• It has about 86 billion neurons (brain cells)
• It can grow new connections your whole life
• Every time you learn something, your brain physically changes
• The more you practice, the stronger those connections get
• Struggling makes your brain grow more than getting things right easily

### Want to Learn More?

Ask your teacher or librarian for books about:
• How your brain works
• Growth mindset
• Famous inventors and their mistakes
• How athletes and musicians practice

### The End... and the Beginning.

**(Because your story is still being written!)**

# About the Author

Suneeta Mall is a passionate advocate for children's emotional and educational development. With a deep commitment to nurturing growth mindset principles in young readers, Suneeta creates stories that empower children to embrace challenges, celebrate effort, and believe in their ability to grow and learn.

Through relatable characters and engaging narratives, Suneeta's work helps children understand that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. Her stories provide both children and parents with tools to navigate the emotional landscape of learning, failure, and ultimate success.

When not writing, Suneeta enjoys exploring new learning adventures, connecting with young readers, and discovering the magic in everyday moments of growth and discovery.

This story has been enhanced and expanded using FableFlow, bringing Suneeta's vision to life with rich detail and interactive learning opportunities.

# Index

# Acknowledgments

This book is dedicated to every child who has ever felt "stuck," believed they "couldn't," or thought they weren't "smart enough." You are capable of amazing growth, and your potential is limitless.

Deepest gratitude to Suneeta Mall, whose vision and dedication to children's growth and learning inspired this story. Your commitment to helping children develop resilience, confidence, and a love of learning shines through every page.

To the parents, teachers, and educators who guide children through challenges with patience and encouragement—thank you for being the real-life Calebs who help young learners discover their own magic of YET. Your words of encouragement and belief in children's potential create ripples that last a lifetime.

To the curious children everywhere who ask questions, make mistakes, try again, and never stop

growing—you are the true heroes of this story. Every time you add the word "yet" to "I can't," you unlock a world of possibilities.

Special recognition to the researchers and psychologists who have illuminated the science of growth mindset, particularly Dr. Carol Dweck, whose groundbreaking work continues to transform how we understand learning and human potential.

May this story inspire continued learning, brave attempts, joyful failures, and the unwavering belief that we can all grow, change, and achieve wonderful things—we just might not be there yet.

Keep growing, keep trying, keep believing.

Have you ever thought "I can't do this"? Cassie felt that way about math, and her brother Caleb struggled with other things too. But then they discovered a secret that changed everything—one tiny, powerful word: YET! Join them on an adventure where mistakes become clues, wobbly bike rides lead to victories, and you'll learn that your brain is like a superpower that gets stronger every time you try!

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