

Ten fine words

One day, I held a cheese stick in front of my 14-month-old daughter Melise and asked her if she wanted some. She replied with a big smile and a little “Eese!”

I asked, “Did you say something?” She just smiled back and reached out for the snack.

“Melise, do you like cheese? Cheese? Ch-eeeeeee-ssse?”

“Eese!”

“Yay! You said cheese!” I picked her up and did a little dance. Then we celebrated by eating cheese, of course.

I should maybe back up and explain that up to that point Melise had only ever said “dada,” “hi,” and “da” (the last one means “cat” in Melise language). All are very good words, but that had been the sum of her entire vocabulary for so long that I had almost given up on her saying more.

Right around the same time as the cheese celebration, Melise learned the value of her pointer finger. Everything she pointed to had a name that we would announce to her—what fun!

She once thought the sole purpose of books was to have their pages turned, but she started pausing between pages to point to each thing. If we were ever slow in telling her what the picture was that she was pointing to, she would give us a serious look before pointing again! With all the pointing and naming of things, I would have thought Melise’s vocabulary would be huge by the time she turned 15-months-old! But, alas, she remained relatively quiet.

The Laughing Mom: humorous tales of motherhood

Written by Susan Pfaltzgraff

In little spurts she would sometimes make a sudden announcement. One day in the tub, she said something that sounded a lot like “ducky” while she was playing with her rubber ducky. But she wouldn’t repeat it.

A few days later, she pointed to my mug and said “tea.” I gave her a sip, but could never get her to repeat that one either.

Her dad taught her to say “vase.” It’s strange, I know, but it’s a word nonetheless!

I told myself over and over to be patient. All kids learn in their own time, right?

Then I took Melise to her 15-month doctor visit. The doctor asked how many words Melise knew. I told the doctor that she didn’t know very many.

“Would you say she knows ten?” the doctor asked. I shook my head.

“Less than ten???” I nodded. The doctor had a quizzical look, but just said, “We won’t be worried unless she doesn’t develop more words by your next visit.” Well, the doctor might not worry, but what do you suppose I felt like? Worried!

I couldn’t get it out of my head, so I started a list of “Words Melise Knows.” I wrote down the obvious words that she had used for months, then I started adding the words that I had heard once. Seven words on the list. I felt like a dismal failure!

I made myself a comforting cup of tea and sat down with Melise to read a book. With a casual air, Melise pointed to my cup and said “Tea!” She had just confirmed one of the words! I gave her a big kiss on the head.

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But Melise wasn't done. After something funny happened that same day, she clapped her hands and said "Yay!" And the very next morning she held her hands up to her dad and said "Pick-up!" (or something very similar). And then in a very fine gesture, she said her tenth word: "Mama!" There may have been tears at that point, but I won't bother you with the sappy details!