A child's perspective

I have to be honest right now. Working with elementary school students can be brutal.

Those kids have essentially no filter and no problem saying whatever is on their minds.

Every once in a while my own ego takes a blow from my students' unabashed honesty. One girl in particular is especially quick to question, with great concern, what is wrong with my face at the first sign of a pimple.

Another has pointed out my mustache on multiple occasions. Gee thanks, kids.

Now it might sound like I'm saying having good self-esteem and working with children are mutually exclusive events, but I wouldn't say that is necessarily the case. The great thing about kids is that they also tend to blurt out absurd compliments.

Take, for example, one of my fifth-graders. The other day I was playing piano, and she wandered into the room. I'll be the first to admit that I'm no Mozart, but apparently my banging away at the keys sounds pleasant to the ears of a child.

She said to me, "Miss Brandt, I bet if you played the piano outside, all the birds would fly to you." Talk about bolstering my ego.

Among some of the younger students, there are rumors that I am quite speedy. I would tell you I developed this reputation by beating a second-grade girl at a foot race, but I'm sure that would seem petty.

Never in my life had someone told me that I'm fast, until I started working with children. But now I've had the grand experience of kids claiming I'm a vampire and citing my great speed as irrefutable evidence that I must be.

An even greater moment happened recently, when some new students moved into the residence I work in. The experienced kids from last year were great about showing their new classmates around, filling them in on all they needed to know about life at the boarding school. That included sharing all their inside info on their resident parent, Miss Brandt.

I overheard one of the older girls telling the new ones that I had been in the recent Olympics. That came as a shock, even to me. I had intended to continue eavesdropping, but they all came running to question me about my experience as an Olympic athlete.

As much fun as it would have been to let them continue to believe the tale, I just had to tell them the truth. No, girls, I was not in the Olympics. But they wouldn't believe me!

They thought I was just being modest, and the instigator of the whole ordeal perpetuated that belief by adding more details to her made-up story.

At my insistence that I was not an Olympic swimmer, one of them chimed in with the argument, "But, Miss Brandt, you swim like a torpedo." I can assure you my swimming is more comparable to a buoy, but that compliment sure did bless my heart.

I thanked the girls for their kind words and made sure we were all on the same page. One pulled me aside, letting me know that she was sure that if I had been in the Olympics, my team would have won.

You've got to love a kid's perspective.

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