

The Whistle

by James Baldwin

Nearly two hundred years ago, there lived in Boston a little boy whose name was Benjamin Franklin.

On the day that he was seven years old, his mother gave him a few pennies.

He looked at the bright, yellow pieces and said, "What shall I do with these coppers, mother?"

It was the first money that he had ever had.

"You may buy something with them, if you would like," said his mother.

"And will you give me more when they are gone?" he asked.

His mother shook her head and said: "No, Benjamin. I cannot give you any more. So you must be careful not to spend them foolishly."

The little fellow ran out into the street. He heard the pennies jingle in his pocket as he ran. He felt as though he was very rich.

Boston was at that time only a small town, and there were not many stores. As Benjamin ran down toward the busy part of the street, he wondered what he should buy.

Should he buy candy or toys? It had been a long time since he had tasted candy. As for toys, he hardly knew what they were.

If he had been the only child in the family, things might have been different. But there were fourteen boys and girls older than he, and two little sisters that were younger.

It was as much as his father could do to earn food and clothing for so many. There was no money to spend for toys.

Before Benjamin had gone very far he met a boy blowing a whistle.

"That is just the thing that I want," he said. Then he hurried on to the store where all kinds of things were kept for sale.

"Have you any good whistles?" he asked.

He was out of breath from running, but he tried hard to speak like a man.

"Yes, plenty of them," said the man.

"Well, I want one, and I'll give you all the money I have for it," said the little fellow. He forgot to ask the price.

"How much money have you?" asked the man.

Benjamin took the coppers from his pocket. The man counted them and said, "All right, my boy. It's a bargain."

Then he put the pennies into his money drawer, and gave one of the whistles to the boy.

Benjamin Franklin was a proud and happy boy. He ran home as fast as he could, blowing his whistle as he ran.

His mother met him at the door and said, "Well, my child, what did you do with your pennies?"

"I bought a whistle!" he cried. "Just hear me blow it!"

"How much did you pay for it?"

"All the money I had."

One of his brothers was standing by and asked to see the whistle. "Well, well!" he said, "did you spend all of your money for this thing?"

"Every penny," said Benjamin.

"Did you ask the price?"

"No. But I offered them to the man, and he said it was all right."

His brother laughed and said, "You are a very foolish fellow. You paid four times as much as it is worth."

"Yes," said his mother, "I think it is rather a dear whistle. You had enough money to buy a whistle and some candy, too."

The little boy saw what a mistake he had made. The whistle did not please him any more. He threw it upon the floor, and began to cry. But his mother took him upon her lap and said:

"Never mind, my child. We must all live and learn; and I think that my little boy will be careful, after this, not to pay too dear for his whistles."

Schooldays

by James Baldwin

When Benjamin Franklin was a boy there were no great public schools in Boston as there are now. But he learned to read almost as soon as he could talk, and he was always fond of books.

His nine brothers were older than he, and every one had learned a trade.

They did not care so much for books.

"Benjamin shall be the scholar of our family," said his mother.

"Yes, we will educate him for a minister," said his father. For at that time all the most learned men were ministers.

And so, when he was eight years old, Benjamin Franklin was sent to a grammar school, where boys were prepared for college. He was a very apt scholar, and in a few months was promoted to a higher class.

But the lad was not allowed to stay long in the grammar school. His father was a poor man. It would cost a great deal of money to give Benjamin a college education. The times were very hard. The idea of educating the boy for the ministry had to be given up.

In less than a year he was taken from the grammar school, and sent to another school where arithmetic and writing were taught.

He learned to write very well, indeed; but he did not care so much for arithmetic, and so failed to do what was expected of him.

When he was ten years old he had to leave school altogether. His father needed his help; and though Benjamin was but a small boy, there were many things that he could do.

He never attended school again. But he kept on studying and reading; and we shall find that he afterwards became the most learned man in America.

Benjamin's father was a soap-boiler and candle-maker. And so when the boy was taken from school, what kind of work do you think he had to do?

He was kept busy cutting wicks for the candles, pouring the melted tallow into the candle-moulds, and selling soap to his father's customers.

Do you suppose that he liked this business?

He did not like it at all. And when he saw the ships sailing in and out of Boston harbor, he longed to be a sailor and go to strange, far-away lands, where candles and soap were unknown.

But his father would not listen to any of his talk about going to sea.

Sources:

Baldwin, James. "Schooldays." *Four Great Americans*. Electronic.

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