

## **Oh, What Lessons Our Children Can Teach Us**

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The rink at the Empire State Plaza opened last month, and my family's been taking advantage of the ice this odd winter. We like to skate on ponds, but that's only been possible a few days. And given the lack of sledding and cross-country skiing, the state's invented and maintained ice has been a nice place to exercise outdoors.

When we go, my older son, Francis, brings a friend, and I become invisible. That's fine and proper — he's 13 and this is the only agony of adolescence so far. At home, in the car, anywhere friends are not, I'm still an acceptable part of his life.

My younger son, Felix, ignores me for a different reason. He's excited by new people to talk to, and gloms on to pretty young women or people he might make some connection to — like, hey, you're human! What a coincidence, me, too!

I understand his exuberant interest. I like to talk to strangers, get a little window on their story. This is the way we're wired. My mom says I used to chat with people when I was in the shopping cart, remarking on the cereal they pulled from the shelves. "Hey, you like Froot Loops? We do too!" While my son and I share this urge to converse, he skates in a way I don't recognize. Felix is 8 and has been skating a few years, but only this year, it seems, is he finding his footing. And he is not cautious as he learns this physicality, but ramming full speed ahead. Arms out, head forward, everything going at once, he looks like he's about to fall any second, and often, he does.

The drops mostly don't bug him. Only once does he pick himself up and take a break on the bench at the side, ask for some water. Very soon he is ready to be on the rink again, living right at his periphery, skating not just with his feet but with his hands and elbows and head, all these pieces working to move forward and find balance. It is an impressive sight, this will in motion. His self sits on the surface of his skin, pouncing on the cold air and his skating.

When he falls, he picks himself up and goes for it again, looking like he's about to tumble and flail, but moving almost graciously in his haste and determination. He seems certain in his unsteadiness. There is a lesson in this kid. He flies on the ice as if he knows what he's doing. But his body moves so much, correcting, correcting, balance, balance, spill, that you can see his confidence is all mental. This serves him well. Eventually, his body will catch up to what he's doing and really know as much about skating as he thinks he knows.

Neither my husband nor I taught him this method. How could you ever tell someone to go for it as if you knew already how to do it?

Sure, you could say it, but the words would be meaningless if you had any fear or doubt. That kind of attack is automatic, inspired from inside.

I hope I can learn something from watching Felix. Maybe he can teach me that falling is a part of getting on your feet.

Sure, he gets frustrated. Reading continues to be a struggle for him; sheer belief isn't working its magic on that front. Mostly though, he seems to see life through this lens, assuming he can master whatever task is before him. Maybe his bravery will rub off on his mom.

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