



Christmas Newsletter 2019

Dear Families,

It is often said that "A picture paints a thousand words" and as this term draws to a close, we wanted to share a few festive photos with you. We think that they show so many elements of what we stand for as a school: our commitment to providing your children with an exciting and truly personalised curriculum that builds on their strengths and motivations, and experiences that they will remember and cherish, regardless of whether they can put these into words. We also think they show the importance of connections and positive relationships, of joy and belonging, and of happiness. And as the actress Audrey Hepburn said: *"The most important thing is to enjoy your life, to be happy, it's all that matters"*.

We would like to say a huge thank you to every single person within the Riverside School community, our pupils, families, staff and community partners for making Riverside School the very special place that it is. A particular thank you goes to our colleagues Molly, Sam, Cally, Jo, Rosie and Nancy who will be moving on at the end of the week – we wish you all every success for the future.

As this is a special Christmas edition, we thought you may like the following story, written by Adam Price, son of one of our wonderful teaching assistants, Marie.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas.

Steve Solomons
Headteacher



The High Jumper Who Jumped for the Moon

There once was a high jumper who was renowned across the country. Throughout his career, he astonished the public with his increasingly daring stunts, from jumping from one side of a highway street to another to jumping over the tall chapel in the town that he lived.

On every event, a crowd of reporters, cameramen and general onlookers would gather some distance from the high jumper, watching his every move with such anticipation, it was amazing they themselves didn't jump up from the tension. The unerring attention of the crowd would always unnerve the high jumper, but still he would manage to leap over the objective of his stunt and the crowd would cheer and hoot in amazement. The high jumper, however, was not entirely proud of the publicity he had gathered from his stunts. As it turns out, as his stunts became more and more risky, the more he felt he needed to go further, to avoid disappointing his audience and risk humiliation. He was recently finding that the seemingly unblinking gaze of the reporters, the cameramen and onlookers terrified him, as if daring him to fail.

Then, one day, when asked by a reporter what his next stunt will be, he boasted, "I will jump from the Earth to the Moon in one bound! All twelve-thousand miles!" His outrageous claim was spread far and wide until even the biggest news company caught wind of the upcoming stunt and decided to document it. Even the Duke was said to have visited the site of the event, a wide field of green grass that sat some distance from the highway, to come and see the moon jumper.

The event took place at night. In the middle of the field was a long path made by flattening the grass, with the high jumper at one end. By the other end, high in the night sky, the moon shone like a giant silver coin floating in space. The crowds gathered on each side of the path so that when he ran, he was flanked by rows of observing eyes and anticipating smiles. But he kept his gaze on the target high in the sky, crouched in the starting position. When the man with the starting pistol at the other end of the path fired the gun into the stars, he leapt from his stance and started to sprint. He kept his gaze forward, his cheeks puffing and his brow beginning to sweat. His legs were already beginning to burn, just as they did in every stunt before. But still, he ran faster, ignoring the silent protests of every muscle in his body, his eyes now drifting up towards the moon.

Usually in the moments before jumping, his mind was clear of any thoughts. But now, as he crossed the halfway point of the path, he heard a quiet voice in his head that said, "I can't do this. No one can jump to the moon. I'll just fall onto the field and they'll be disappointed in me." He tried to ignore it as he reached the end of the path, but he found himself agreeing with it. Was this even possible? Well, he's about to find out.

The crowd watched in awe as he shot straight into the sky, a speeding shape growing smaller and smaller, heading straight to the moon. There was no sound, only a wide-eyed silence as the high jumper rose higher and higher. Already, he was reaching the clouds high above. He noticed that the air was getting thinner as he rose, and his ears were starting to pop. The moon didn't seem to be getting closer either. The jumper began to panic. It was beginning to occur to him that twelve-thousand miles was a very, very long distance to jump. He hoped that once he pierced the atmosphere, he would just keep flying indefinitely until he landed. He was realising, however, that the air would run out before he landed.

His vision began to blur. Purple lights began to swim in his eyes. His heart pounded like a piston beating his chest from the inside. His breathing was becoming more laboured. By the time he left the atmosphere, he was unconscious.

He woke up on a rocky, pocketed surface. His outstretched hand began to feel around him. Eventually, when he found the strength, he pushed himself up and looked around. Deep, black space surrounded him at every angle, speckled with a multitude of white pins of light. Looking down, he saw that the surface, instead of the greyish-white he hoped for, was a dark brown. He had landed on an asteroid passing between the Earth and the moon! Even here, he could see the moon far off in the distance.

He wanted to scream in rage, but feared he would use up what air was left on the asteroid. He had failed! The moon glowed in the darkness of space, seemingly taunting him. He had disappointed his fans and lost his reputation. He remained on his elbows, tears dripping onto the pocketed surface of the asteroid.

However, a sound filtered through his ears that made him stop crying, like the ringing of many glass wind chimes. He looked up and saw that the stars, which seemed so far away, were starting to move. They swept across the cosmos as if carried by a wind current, a trail of sparkling light that circled the asteroid from afar and became a translucent wall of lights. Within the wall that surrounded him but did not seem intended to trap him, he saw great shapes form in the celestial film of stars; a burly, bare-chested man wielding a sword and shield, a gigantic crab that scuttled across the canvas of space, a harp that played a melody that replaced the high jumper's tears of despair with that of joy.

He started to smile. It was if the stars had come to congratulate him, despite his failure to reach the moon. He looked back to the Earth, and saw that the crowd, who were once staring with wide, mesmerised eyes were now cheering louder than they ever did, loud enough to be heard from far into space. He breathed a sigh of relief and felt his heart lighten. He may not have reached the moon, but he at least landed among stars.

Soon, he would make one more bound to return to Earth and perhaps take a hard-earned rest from his ventures. At the moment, however, he chose to sit down on the asteroid and watch the cosmic show of the constellations dance before him.

The End

Hello, reader. My name is Adam Price and I am a 17½ year-old college student with high-functioning Autism. My mum is a teaching assistant at Riverside School.

For a little context about that story; every Monday at 3:30, I meet with my personal tutor Helen, an elderly Russian vocational headteacher (meaning she does it without pay and does it only because she loves doing it) and a very nice lady, to have a general talk. The main focus of the chats, at least from Helen's side, is to help me with whatever skills and areas that I want to improve on, one of which being self-esteem, which I don't have much of. For this purpose, she had me do an online multi-choice test related to self-esteem, which would then generate a print-out with pieces of advice based on my results.

Notably, the last piece of advice included an old saying which goes, "Reach for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among stars." After we read through the print-out, Helen gave me what was essentially optional homework; to write a short story based off that saying. I'm a generally creative person, and as I headed down to the train station on my way home, I was already forming the basis of the story in my head.

My intention was to write an allegorical fairy tale about the pressures of high standards and the resulting anxiety that arises from those standards. The story is based on my own perfectionist habits of thought which impact my college work. The message I wanted to convey, in line with the saying, is that it's not bad to aim high; only you shouldn't feel bad for not reaching that target, since where you'll land will still yield great rewards. At some point in our lives, we will feel the pressure to excel (which I definitely felt in my first secondary school) and sometimes we will be in a position where we don't want to disappoint those who want us to excel, whether that be our parents or our teachers.

In a way, I wanted to convey to a younger audience that when they do feel that pressure, they shouldn't fall into the same perfectionist habits that I did and beat themselves up whenever they make a mistake. Life is built on our mistakes; they are, after all, how we learn. There are no one-shots in anything besides living. If you fail once, you can always try another time. As Samuel Beckett once said, "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better."

This is a lesson that, while I know it consciously, I still need to teach the subconscious part of me. I lived a fairly stressful school life, made even worse by my autism, and perhaps adopted a fairly cynical outlook from those experiences. I hope that the message of my story will inspire those younger than me, who are scientifically easier to teach than teens and adults, to avoid that cynicism and remain confident in the face of challenges in their lives.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed my story and learn something from it.

Adam

