



A Dark and Evil Moment

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Matthew Cordell is the author and illustrator of several books for children, including *WISH*, *ANOTHER BROTHER*, and *HELLO! HELLO!*, a *New York Times* notable picture book. Matthew is also the illustrator of many books for kids, including *LIKE PICKLE JUICE ON A COOKIE* and its sequels. He lives outside of Chicago with his wife, author Julie Halpern, and their two children.
matthewcordell.com

Talk it Out

Read the following quote spoken by Al Pacino in the movie *City Hall* (1996):

Be careful how you judge people. You don't sum up a man's life in one moment.

Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer using examples from Matthew Cordell's story where applicable.

Matthew says that he and his brother were friends with this boy because they didn't want him to be alone. The boy was an only child, and there weren't a lot of kids around. Under what circumstances can friendship include standing up to a friend? Brainstorm a list of the pros and cons of standing up to a friend who has done something you think is wrong.

Brainstorm a list of the pros and cons of snitching, using Matthew's story as one example. Is it possible to be a friend to someone and snitch on that person?

What do you think it would have been like for Matthew if he hadn't had his brother to talk to about this moment that felt so dark and evil? In other words, what would it have been like if he felt like he couldn't tell anyone? He says it's terrible to keep something like that bottled up inside. Why do you think he says that, and do you agree?

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- About the kid who threw the dog, Matthew says, "I don't think he was a bad person. I just I don't know what was happening in his life where doing something like that would make sense." Explore why the boy might have done what he did by imagining one day in his life and writing about it.
- Write a diary entry about something that happened a while ago, but you think you'll remember it for a very long time.
- Imagine that Matthew, his brother, and the kid who threw the dog are all outside playing when someone arrives looking for the dog. Write two different versions of this scene: one in which the truth is told and one in which it is not. Be sure to include dialogue.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY

Matthew: I still think about this one moment, where we had this neighbor. See, my parents were divorced when I was at a really young age. So we lived mostly with my mom; but at my dad's house we had this neighbor friend. He was just slightly older than my brother and I. And he, I'm not sure why but he had a very, he had a dark streak, you know. And anyway we had this creek by our house and there was a really deep ravine in this one part of the creek, I mean deep like 20 feet deep, probably. And we were out playing and then this dog came up, a stray dog.

And my brother and I, whenever we'd see a dog or animal growing up, we were pretty comfortable with animals; and we would pet the dog if it seemed friendly. And this dog seemed friendly, harmless and curious about us. Well, this kid, he goes up to the dog and he said, "I've seen this dog before. I don't want him around here," or something like that. And he picked up the dog, and he threw it into the ravine. I still think about that.

You know, he didn't pick it up over his head and throw it like that fiercely; but just the fact that you would do that, like who does that? It's just, it was frightening. It sort of limped away. And my brother and I were just, just numb that that even happened. Like how does that happen? And I don't think he was a bad person. I just I don't know what was happening in his life where doing something like that would make sense, you know. I still remember that. It was a very dark and evil moment, that someone would be so harmful to something that was so harmless, you know.

That was an uncomfortable, dark, evil moment. I mean, the thing is, he was an only child, and there weren't a lot of kids in the neighborhood; and this was, you

know, by my dad's house. So we weren't with him a lot. So there was this side of it that you don't wanna leave someone alone. It felt like he needed friends, you know. And maybe he didn't; maybe I'm just reading too much into it.

I don't remember if we ever revealed these kind of things to our parents, you know. Cause there's this element of snitching on people as a kid that you feel like you're not supposed to say things and you don't want somebody to get in trouble. So you kinda just hold onto that stuff, and that's terrible, you know, to just keep that in. At least I had my brother to keep it with. He and I will still to this day kind of remember that occasionally and just say how weird that was and how bad that was.

But in time, you know, we all got older, and we just stopped seeing each other ... Just in time we grew apart. I'm sure he must've evolved. I don't know what his story is to this day.

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Illustration by Matthew Cordell