

writenow! competition 2009

Year 9 – Runner Up
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A Licence to Teach

I was just getting off the bus when an old guy with a waist-length white beard burst out of the newsagency and ran towards me, shouting, "At last! The saviour of the world, you have arrived!"

I kept walking and pretended I hadn't seen him, even when he lay down on the footpath behind me and starting calling out "All hail to the great one!"

A quick backwards glance confirmed that in addition to the long white fake beard, he was also wearing a kind of orange jumpsuit with a zip up the front, yellow gumboots and a New York Yankees baseball cap that was about four sizes too small.

"That's your dad, isn't it?" whispered my best friend Ellen. "In disguise?"

"Nope," I said. "Never seen him before."

I hoped nobody else would recognise him. It wasn't much of a hope, since my equal best-friend Roger, known as 'Rabbit' added, "Why has your dad dressed up like that?"

Has he gone crazy?"

"No, he hasn't gone crazy," I hissed through my clenched teeth. "He's got a good reason."

He did too, but it was incredibly top secret. So amazingly top secret I couldn't even tell my two very best friends in the whole wide world. Not if I wanted them to stay alive.

You see, my dad works for the DET – the Department of Education and Training. And yes, he's got a licence to teach. His involvement with the department is not meant to be known by anyone – not even me. If anyone finds out that I know ... then my chances of living past the age of 13 aren't good. Life can be tough when your dad's part of an illegal organisation.

Normally, my dad's just an average guy who works in 'Melanie's Butchery' six days a week, but once in a while he gets a call from his 'cousin' (who is actually the Director General) and off he goes – like today.

"Are you sure Adam?" asked Rabbit. "He looks like those pictures of *teachers* my parents showed me."

"Of course I'm sure!" I said impatiently, hurriedly changing the subject "Now hurry up, the movie will start soon."

I attempted to pull Ellen and Rabbit towards the cinema, but they were too busy staring open-mouthed at my dad reciting Pythagoras theorem while juggling four bananas. He finished Pythagoras theorem, then went on to describe Bernoulli's principle. Ellen turned around, dragging Rabbit by the wrist. She shook her head, as if to clear out the knowledge she had just gained and then glanced at her watch.

"Stop staring Rabbit!" she said. "We've got to hurry up or the movie's going to start without us."

"But –" whinged Rabbit, staring longingly at my Dad.

"Come on," I interrupted. "You might learn something. We'd better go."

I grabbed his other wrist and together Ellen and I half-carried him up the street into the cinema. While we were lining up for popcorn Ellen suddenly elbowed me in the stomach.

"Is your dad following us or something?" she asked.

I spun around, knocking my popcorn to the ground, and there was my dad, lining up to get a movie ticket. Our eyes met and I immediately wished they hadn't.

"I have found you again, great one!" he yelled loud enough for everyone in the foyer to hear. "I come with knowledge – which I will share!"

There was a collective gasp. I looked around to see whether anyone had realised who he was talking to, and my spirits drooped. Even a pack of toddlers were staring at me. My dad paused, suddenly aware of the attention he was receiving, and

beamed. He raced over to the toddlers and began to explain how to tie their shoelaces, despite their mother's outrage. A crowd began to gather around him, everyone unsure of how to react.

Rabbit watched, fascinated.

"Your dad is so cool!" he whispered to me. "I wish my dad did things like that."

I stared at Rabbit. Cool? My dad was breaking the law! He could get carted off to jail at the drop of a hat, and Rabbit thought that was a good thing? Some people just didn't get it.

The toddler's lesson was cut short by their mother hurrying them off into the theatre, leaving my dad kneeling in the middle of the foyer. The crowd began to disperse and my dad got up and walked dejectedly out of the cinema. I felt sorry for him; after all, he was my dad.

"So, are we going to watch this movie or what?" asked Ellen, who was seemingly unaffected by what had just happened.

"I think I'll pass, just for today," I replied, and headed towards the door after my dad. I heard Rabbit telling Ellen an excuse for me as I stepped outside. I walked down to a park where I could see my dad sitting underneath a large tree. As I got closer I could hear him half-heartedly calling out the factors of eighty eight to a passing businessman, but he soon gave up, took out his mobile phone and dialled a number. I crept up behind the tree and listened. "Uh, hello?" he paused, listening to the other person speak. "Yes, it's James Oxford. I just want to say – it's not working. People just don't want to learn; especially if it's illegal. I think it's just not worth it. Let's face it – learning's dead and gone."

My dad hung up the phone and put it in his pocket. With a sudden rush of courage, I stepped out from behind the tree.

"Adam?" he said, surprised. "Why are you here?"

"I know what you're doing. You're trying to teach people," I said, all in the one breath. "And yes, I know about the DET, but please don't kill me."

My dad chuckled. "I have a licence to teach, not a licence to kill." He paused. "But if we don't learn, we're all going to die anyway." He leant closer and opened his hand. His palm was covered in black marks.

"Disease," he whispered.