

Columnists

Field trip in the Giant Sparkle

The Baird Facts

April 16, 2010, 03:21 PM EST

BEVERLY, MASS. –

By **Esther C. Baird**

Recently, in a burst of enthusiasm and parental good will, I volunteered to be a driver for my eldest daughter's kindergarten trip to the Sea Coast Science Center in New Hampshire. I figured it was a fairly straightforward volunteer role that didn't involve baked goods or magazine sales.

One week later, I found myself with four kindergarten-aged girls, including my daughter, and their accompanying booster seats, lunch bags, coats and backpacks piled into the Giant Sparkle (the name of our minivan as regular readers will recall). I gazed at them in my rear mirror and smiled. Perfect, I thought. They'd talk and giggle amongst themselves while I drove zen-like north to New Hampshire.

Indeed, for the first 30 minutes, they did just that.

But at 9:45 a.m. my daughter announced that, "In our family we eat a snack at ten o'clock, don't we Mommy?"

I agreed that yes, on the days when we were all at home, we tended to eat snacks around ten.

"Well," my daughter continued, "that's only 15 minutes. Then we can have a snack. Right?"

"Sure, fine by me." I shrugged my shoulders willing the conversation to end there.

Instead I felt eight eyes boring into the back of my neck.

Five minutes later one of the girls asked, "Is it ten yet?"

"What about now?" The third girl chimed in.

It was 9:56.

My daughter, ever vigilant jumped in. "Four minutes. We can have a snack in four minutes. Right?"

I stared ahead and drove, but I knew there was no escaping the Snack Discussion Vortex.

"Four minutes? Then we can have a snack?"

"Is it ten o'clock yet?"

"No, but let's get our snacks out so we are ready."

"What about now?"

The frenzy built as the clocked changed to 9:57 and then 9:58 and then 9:59. Finally, like fireworks at Disney, ten o'clock rolled around to great oohs and ahhs. I heard the instant crinkling and crackling of zippy bags and foil wrappers being torn into as if by a pack of winter-starved wolves.

Satiated, the intensity level dropped just in time for us to arrive at the center, which was wonderful. I was happy to wander around with the class and their teacher to the touch tanks and aquariums and whale movies. But the attention span of a kindergarten class is fleeting at best, and two hours later, I was back in the Giant Sparkle with my four passengers.

I began the return drive by smiling and saying, "Girls, snack at will, and please do not feel you have to inform me when you do."

They met my announcement with a blank stare. And I realized that I was now ferrying about that rare breed of creature: the over-tired and irritable 5-year-old. Almost immediately I was proven right.

"Stop staring at me."

"I'm not staring at you."

"Yes you are. Everybody is staring at me."

"I'm not staring at her, are you staring at her?"

"You are staring!"

"No fair! Everyone is staring. Stop it!"

"Fine! I'm going to look out the window."

"No, I'm already looking out this window!"

I couldn't keep up with who was looking where. At least the snack drama had made physiological sense. I began to mentally invent a limo-like window partition for minivans when Julie Andrews saved the day.

I heard her voice waft through the radio.

"Let's start at the very beginning . . ." I cranked the volume up, ". . . a very fine place to be."

I looked at the girls' eyes in my rear view mirror and with my best musical voice, infused with a proper British accent, I joined in.

"When you read you begin with A-B-C,"

They stared at me – had their driver gone crazy?

"When you sing you begin with Do Re Mi,"

And then, one of the girls rolled her eyes and laughed. I kept belting it out knowing that an over-tired child was just one mood-change away from a goofy child.

"Do Re Mi. The first three notes just happen to be, Do Re Mi . . ."

My daughter and the other girls looked at each other with repressed snorts and snickers. Then, one by one they joined in until, hurtling down the highway, we all were singing our hearts out. We sang with precision the, "Doe, a deer, a female deer," portion. We sang a bit more chaotically during the, "when you know the notes to sing," section and finally we sang loudly, but in no particular order whatsoever, during the final, "Do Re Mi," round.

The Giant Sparkle was a musical on wheels and I returned my charges back to school smiling and slap-happy if not exactly zen-like. Perhaps next year I'll try magazine sales.

Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact her with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at: www.estherbaird.com.