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I Lied To My Kids About Meeting A Mermaid And Had A Crisis Of Conscience

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Every night before I turn the lights out, I tell my girls — ages five and seven — a story. They like to hear true stories from my life, especially from when I was young, before I met their mother.

They find it incredible to imagine that all these things happened before they existed, and that their mom had a whole other life apart from mine. The stories only take a couple of minutes, but I'm starting to run out of material; my life isn't that interesting.

Relevant Reading: [Never Do Anything Nice for Your Kids](#)

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/never-do-anything-nice-for-your-kids-or-the-best-things-in-life-are-tickles>)

So a few weeks ago, wracking my brain for an episode of my life not yet mined for a vignette, I made something up. It was about that time I met a mermaid. I thought they'd laugh and call me out immediately, but the problem was that the story was too good.

I told them I was around 11 years old, visiting England with my parents and sister (this part is true). We took a walk down by the beach and I lagged behind, digging for shells and poking rotten fish with a stick (also true). Then I saw a mermaid, sitting up on a rock just in the shallows of the tide.

"Hello," she said.

"Uh, hi," I said. "Are you a mermaid?"

"Sure am."

"How do I know this is real?"

"I guess you don't know for sure. But I'll tell you something. When you're fully grown you're going to get married and have three little girls named Sonia, Elizabeth and Marie. And they will be as beautiful as mermaids. Once that happens you'll know that I was real."

Silence. The girls' eyes widened.

"Oh my God," said Sonia.

"I knew it!" said Elizabeth.

I felt terrible. They trusted me completely. And I didn't even come clean afterwards; I mumbled "good night" and ran into the kitchen to my wife.

"What do I do?" I said

"Oh man," she laughed. "That's why I don't tell them stories anymore."

I decided to let them bring it up again if they had questions. They didn't. They were convinced it was true, and it changed the way they saw the world. It brought magic into their lives as they imagined alternative worlds and the possibility that one day, they too would meet a mermaid.

A couple of weeks later I brought it up. I was getting worried Sonia would insist that mermaids were real with her grade 2 classmates, enduring ridicule.

"They were convinced it was true, and it changed the way they saw the world."

"So, remember I told you that story about the mermaid? Do you think that was true or do you think I made it up?" I said.

They looked at me.

"I made it up. It was from my imagination," I said.

"I knew it," said Elizabeth.

Sonia was more confused. I reminded her about the power of imagination and asked her if she considered what I had done a lie.

She thought about it.

“No,” she said finally, “When you tell a lie it’s mean. Stories aren’t mean.”

Phew. I was off the hook. I then asked them if, in the future, they wanted me to tell them whether stories were “true in real life” or “from my imagination.”

Elizabeth knew right away. “Tell me,” she said.

Sonia, to my surprise said, “tell me, but only a few days later. Let me try and figure it out first.”

So, proceeding with full disclosure, I continued the mermaid story. It involved some magic powder that allowed me to breath underwater where I visited the mermaid village. We travelled around together looking for the missing mermaid princess. We met turtles and dolphins and a warrior seahorse named Dave.

They loved it, and it didn’t matter that they knew it was fake.

Relevant Reading: I’m Not Here to Make Life Magical for My Children

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/im-not-here-to-make-life-magical-for-my-children>)

Sonia would add characters to the story or introduce a new plot line. She did so in second person, telling me “you then swam to the cave...” playing along with my deceitful use of the first person.

Last night the story finally came to a close (turns out the princess was playing music with the dolphins the whole time).

I will use this opportunity to take a break from telling stories for a while. It’s stressful keeping all those lies straight.

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