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## When One Child Has More Extracurricular Success Than Their Siblings

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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Our eldest daughter had a banner spring. She performed remarkably well in a series of spelling bees (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/a-look-into-the-wild-deeply-regulated-world-of-a-kids-pandemic-spelling-bee>), winning some serious money in competitions in Toronto and Montreal.

But this article is not about her. It's about her sisters, ages nine and five, who had to cope with being thrust into a rather large and intimidating shadow.

## There Isn't Always Money In The Lemonade Stand

“I’ve been thinking about how I can make money like that,” said our middle daughter, Elizabeth, as her older sister purchased a laptop with her spelling bee winnings. “But I can’t think of anything I’m that good at. Maybe I could sell some of my drawings (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/my-seven-year-old-fashion-designer>) online?” she offered. She’d also been taking piano lessons (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/we-want-our-kids-to-play-music-like-we-do-but-nothing-is-working>), but to make money at any of those things, we explained, requires years, even decades, of structured practice.

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"We pointed out that their sister's success was not a very typical way for a child to earn their first dollar."

We pointed out that their sister’s success was not a very typical way for a child to earn their first dollar, but it still stings for them to watch her play *Minecraft* whenever she wants on her very own, self-bought computer.

“How about a lemonade stand?” said Elizabeth. We tried to explain the economics to her, but she got bored even before we introduced the distinction between fixed and variable costs (no surprise).

Thankfully, our youngest daughter, Maria, thinks money is something that grows in a dish by the front door, coins that clink together like pirate treasure should. But aside from dealing with the financial windfall that hit their sister, Elizabeth and Maria also had to hear all the adults in their life praise her constantly. They stood dutifully by as she posed for pictures, shook the hands of local politicians and scooped up gift bags full of free water bottles and gift certificates.

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## Making A Weekend Bee Special For All

During our trip to Montreal we decided to separate the kids and give the younger two a special day for themselves. They got to swim in the hotel pool, watch a Netflix show of their choosing and eat as much pizza as physically possible. They played with cousins they don’t see very often and ate bagels.

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"She opened her gifts in the hotel room, making it seem like her birthday was the reason for our trip and the spelling bee just happened to also be there."

One weekend, Elizabeth's birthday coincided with a spelling bee. At the hotel restaurant that evening the entire waitstaff came out to sing *Happy Birthday*, bathing her in attention that had previously been directed at her sister. She opened her gifts in the hotel room, making it seem like her birthday was the reason for our trip and the spelling bee just happened to also be there.

We also ordered breakfast in bed for everyone the next morning.

"We can just eat it in bed?" said Maria, incredulously.

"Yup. It's a special occasion," we said without specifying.

Later when we asked our eldest what her favorite part of the spelling bee was, she said "eating breakfast in bed." It reminded us that she, too, wasn't fond of the extra attention suddenly directed at her. During the competition in Montreal, she was serene and happy, but at the awards ceremony she became stressed and grumpy, and afterwards needed a couple of hours by herself to unwind (by reading, naturally). She told us later that she would still compete in spelling bees if she didn't win money, or if she didn't receive so much praise. She loves language so much and honestly enjoys the competitions for their own sake. (The feeling is not mutual. I, for one, find spelling bees excruciatingly uncomfortable

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/a-look-into-the-wild-deeply-regulated-world-of-a-kids-pandemic-spelling-bee>) and would never have thought to introduce her to this particular extracurricular activity).

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**Joseph Wilson and his wife want their children to play music like they do, but how do you spark a child's passion for a subject?**

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/we-want-our-kids-to-play-music-like-we-do-but-nothing-is-working>)

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"You've got to find something you love to do," we explain to Elizabeth.

"But how?" she asks.

"By trying a lot of different things and seeing what makes you feel good," we say. She doesn't seem convinced. It's hard to explain where that passion comes from.

So unless there's a way to make money from doing somersaults on the couch, or putting a cardboard moustache on the cat or dancing outside when it rains, our youngest daughters are doomed to a life of playing *Minecraft* on their parents'

computer.

These are all activities that don't necessarily elicit praise from adults (or cats) but they bring joy nonetheless.

As such, they should be celebrated too.



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