

Take Your Kid to Work Day

He didn't know it yet, but Jenns Abbott's number was up.

By eight pm, he was brushing his teeth in his white fleece pajamas which depicted various colored race cars zooming nowhere in particular. Brushing was one of the things his father had instilled on him before he went away for work, two years earlier. The blue toothbrush, a gift from the same person, was showing its age, but it did the trick.

Jenns finished his dental duties, then walked to his mother in the living room to say goodnight. He was nine, but still allowed himself to be kissed on the cheek.

"Night Jenns. Love you," she said as she gazed at him and smiled, temporarily putting her cigarette down.

Jenns climbed the narrow steep stairs and walked down the worn carpet in the hallway to his room. The floor, as did the ceiling, had a slight side incline, the result of a hundred years of frost on the old homestead.

He turned the light on in his room, giving it the once over to make sure he had a clear line of movement to his bed. He left the door open a bit just in case he had to holler to his mother. Then, turning the switch off, he made a run for it. The last five feet he was in the air, landing on the unmade twin bed and covering most of himself with blankets all in one fluid motion. As any child would know, the blankets were refuge, even if untested under duress.

Jenns pretended to close his eyes, keeping the lids open just a bit to ensure there was no movement in the room. Satisfied he truly was alone, he then fished for his flashlight under the blankets and tested it before turning it off. He snuggled in and fell asleep.

Two hours later, before she went to sleep just down the hall, Leanne took one last peek at her son, then closed the door to his room.

Soon, the only sound heard in the whole house was the ticking of the grandfather clock that had been in the house longer than Jenns and his mother combined.

That night, Jenns dreamed for the first time in a long time about his father. Realizing his mistake in leaving, he had finally decided to come home. They were at the circus, as he had always promised Jenns to see the elephants. The elephants were about to come out, and when Jenns offered his dad some peanuts he realized it wasn't his dad anymore. His dad was now a monster with a bald head, long pointed ears, and sharp crooked teeth. Jenns looked away in fear, but his monster father said his name and told him to look at him or he would leave again. Jenns, torn between wanting his father to stay but not wanting to look at the monster, started to look back at him. On his monster father's lap, was a monkey similar to what one would see using an organ grinder in movies. It wore a red hat strapped to his chin and had on a red little vest. The monkey was pissed, shrieking and shaking his fist at Jenns. "You're eating his peanuts, boy! Now, he's gonna eat your toes!" And the monster dad laughed.

Jenns stirred out of his fitful sleep, full of sweat. He knew it was the dead of night, just not when. At first he wasn't fully awake but he knew two things. The first, he

had had a terrible nightmare. Secondly, he no longer felt alone in the bedroom. He snapped out of his grogginess when he realized his name was being spoken.

“Jenns. Jenns. Wake up, Jenns. I’m the boogeyman, and I’m coming for you,” a girl’s voice, at the foot of his bed, was speaking softly but with conviction.

Jenns tried not to move. It was now that he realized he had kicked his blankets off in the night’s tossing and turning and he no longer had any of its protection.

“You had better look at me. Or I’m gonna bite your toes off. One little piggy, two little piggy,” with this, the girl made a slurping sound.

It was too much risk to ignore. In one rapid motion Jenns had grabbed the edge of the blankets with both hands and flung himself in a sitting position against the headboard. His back to the wall and body below the neck now adequately covered in a blanket of winter down, Jenns attempted to make sense of who or what was talking to him.

With the glow of his clock he could tell there was a slender figure, just a bit taller than he would be, standing at the foot of his bed. Its arms were out and bent at the elbow, in a menacing gesture.

“Yeah, you heard me right. I’m gonna do you bad, Jenns Abbott. Your momma ain’t able to help you. And your daddy’s gone. I’ll start with your toes, this little piggy went to market, this-“ the voice then stopped abruptly and the figure seemed to look at Jenn’s closed closet door. A moment later, the girl was into Jenns’ bed right beside him. She pulled the blanket over the two of them. Her movement was so quick and harmless, Jenns didn’t have the chance or reason to yell for help.

“Be quiet and don’t move!” the figure whispered in hushed tones. Jenns could only see darkness under the covers. She was close enough that their bodies were touching. She was cool to the touch and smelled like fish.

It was faint at first, but Jenns could hear the slow opening of his closet door. He hoped it was his mother, but the steps that came out of it were too heavy and slow. Jenns was certain his heart was beating so loud anybody in the room could have heard him. Finding his flashlight under the covers, the girl turned it on and he was filled with panic. She held a finger to her lips, and her eyes were as big as saucers, void of any color, willing him to be quiet and not make a sound. Jenn’s eyes squinted at the unexpected light, but they quickly adjusted and he could see the girl clearly for the first time.

She was grey. She had long matted hair, which didn’t look like a brush had been through it for a very long time. Her face was dirty, and she wore a dirty one piece dress that resembled a nightgown. He wondered if perhaps she was a tomboy like his cousin Molly.

The girl took the finger from her mouth and put it to his, to confirm his understanding. Jenns nodded.

The steps slowly continued into his room, walking to near the foot of the bed. There was silence, then a squawk and cheep from closer to the floor. Thuds and smashes indicated things were being strewn about the room.

Jenns had no choice but to trust the strange girl that had jumped into his bed. She held his hand while he closed his eyes. Eventually, the footsteps could be heard

going towards the door to the hallway. The door creaked open, and the footsteps and cheeping left the room.

Jenns wasn't sure how much more time went by before the girl finally threw the blankets off the bed.

"We don't have long. They'll be back. We need to get out of here now," she hissed.

"What about my mom?" Jenns asked. He didn't know whether he should try to protect his mother or try to get protection from her.

"She's an adult. She'll be fine. But she can't help us," the girl guaranteed. "It's against the rules. Where can we hide?"

Jenns anxiously scanned the room.

"Under the bed?" he hoped, but it didn't look very safe.

"They'll look there again."

"The closet?"

"Are you out of your mind? I think I hear them coming!" she looked legitimately scared.

Jenns looked around again. He was running out of options.

"The window! We can go down the trellis!" Jenns was already heading over to it, stepping on peanut shells as he did. He swiped a stuffed bear and family photo of him and his parents off the ledge to the floor. He tried the wooden framed window but

couldn't budge it. The girl came beside him, helping lift, but to no avail. By now, Jenns was certain he also could the footsteps coming back. He desperately looked around the window, his eyes coming across the lock on the top of the lower frame. He unclasped the lock, and with their combined effort the window came up at last. He climbed out the window as the doorknob to the room started to twist and quickly crawled onto the trellis. The girl was right behind him as the two made their way as quickly as possible down the semi rotten wooden lattice. Thorns ripped at their skin and clothes and splinters pierced their feet and hands until they were finally on the hard cold soil of the earth. The girl tugged at Jenn's arm as he instinctively looked up to see a dark figure looking down at them. There was a secondary movement as a smaller figure moved on the window sill, then also began to climb down the trellis.

"Come on!" as she tugged Jenns with her.

They ran down a darkened path leading to the large dairy barn from the days of Jenn's grandparents. The days of the dairy and cows were long gone, but the barn was still sound and stored hay bales for a neighboring farm.

Jenns opened the man door allowing the two of them in, taking a look at the house before closing it behind him. There were no signs of any movement. He led the girl across the straw covered wooden floor past a derelict stainless steel milk drum, to a conveyer belt that led up to a loft at the other end of the barn.

He climbed the forty-five degree angle with the experience of a boy that had snuck into the barn more often than his mother knew. The girl stayed hot on his tail.

They kept their hands on the round tubular guard as they side stepped the conveyer chain. Once on the loft, they hid behind a bail of hay.

Jenns caught his breath before he whispered.

“Who are we running from?”

“My dad,” she looked down at the floor.

“You’re the boogeyman?” he asked suspiciously.

“Well.... My dad is the boogeyman. And his damned monkey Balthazar. That’s why he won’t take me. It’s supposed to be take your kid to work day. I’m Ree,” and she held out her hand to officially make his acquaintance.

“What does he do? With people,” Jenns asked.

Ree changed the subject. “He won’t look for us very long before he gets bored. He’s been sick lately. Then he’ll be gone. But-“

The man door creaked open at the other end of the barn. Both kids hid lower behind the bale. Jenns looked Ree, waiting for her lead. The footsteps on the scattered hay down below were much harder to hear than on the slanted upstairs floor in his house.

“There’s no way dad will come up that machine to get here. But if Balthazar does, you gotta fight him. If he sees me, I’m dead meat,” Mary whispered.

“What?! No. I’m not fighting some monkey!” Jenns hissed back. He thought he was going to cry.

Ree put her hand on his shoulder. "It's ok. Just show him you aren't afraid of him, that you'll fight him. He'll back right down," she assured him. Then added, "To the monkey. Do not do that to my dad."

There was silence. Then the sound of light movement on the conveyor belt. A moment later, something jumped off the conveyor to the loft where they were. There was a cheeping sound, and up to this point Jenns still had no intention whatsoever of getting tangled up with a monkey or whatever the heck it was that had just joined them.

This, however, was soon out his hands. In a moment, Ree pulled their bale two feet to the side, leaving Jenns completely exposed to the creature stalking them. "Stand your ground," he heard her whisper.

It really was a monkey, with a little red chin strap hat, and red vest. And he hit like a truck.

Jenns collapsed to the floor in a heap after taking one to the stomach. He would have taken more time for self pity and pain recognition but Balthazar was on him immediately. The monkey had both hands around the boy's neck, attempting to choke him unconscious. Balthazar's spittle flew from his mouth as his monkey feet served as added hands in the attempt to restrain Jenns. As they rolled around, Jenns barely felt himself scrape across a nail sticking out from the floor. It left a large slash across his back from one shoulder to the next.

As strong and primal as Balthazar was, he was still only a third the size of Jenns. Jenns was able to man handle the primate and get on top of him, lifting him and pounding him repeatedly into the floor in an effort to break the monkey's grip.

Balthazar finally let off his grip on Jenns and distanced himself to prepare to square up again. The two stared at each other, and were close to wrestling again, when a whistle came from down below on the ground level. Without hesitation, Balthazar ran across the floor and down the conveyor shaft. Ree joined Jenns again, and they listened together as the man door across the barn creaked open again, and closed.

"I think they're gone," Ree smiled.

"You said the monkey wouldn't want to fight," Jenns panted. "He wanted to fight."

Ree giggled. "You did great! I've seen him rip on bigger people than you. You must be pretty tough."

The two cautiously made their way down the conveyer belt and across the barn. Ree cautiously opened the man door, confirming the coast was clear.

"Why did you and your dad and that other monkey thing come here?" Jenns asked.

"Same reason we go anywhere else. Because we can," Ree smiled. "Don't worry. We aren't likely to be back. There are so many other places to hit, we aren't very likely to see you ever again. Besides, you won't remember this come morning. Nobody ever does. But, maybe we'll see your kids sometime. You and your wife will have two girls and a boy, you know. But I'm not gonna tell you in which order. You did good tonight. Goodbye Jenns."

Ree put her bracelet on Jenn's wrist, and walked down the driveway ten feet. She turned back to him, making one more scary "Boo!" sound with her arms up as if to

grab him, then she giggled and waved goodbye. Jenns now had to figure out for himself how to get back into his locked house.

He woke up the next morning, and just as Ree had predicted, Jenns had no recollection of what had happened the night before. His room a mess with a number of crushed peanut shells on the floor. He still had the bracelet on his wrist, and would keep it on for a full year before storing it with other trinkets a pre teen may have.

Jenns continued on with his nightly routine of examining the room and taking a flying leap into his dark bed until he was nearly twelve years old. And as much as he wished otherwise, his father never came back. The laceration on Jenns' back stayed red for a while, but didn't hurt enough or get infected to tell anyone. It would remain as a large scar until he died a very old man many years later.

As for Jenn's own kids ever meeting up with the boogeyman, Ree, or Balthazar, they most certainly did, but that's a whole other story.