

"Why can't you write something nice?" MOM

"I've got no patience for stupid," DAD

# MISBEHAVING IN MAINE



30 HALF-LEARNED LESSONS

Dan Williams

## LESSON 6:

# The More You Love *Star Wars*, The More They Can Hurt You



First grade.

Harry and I were swinging on the swings, swinging and jumping off at the highest point, which means we were flying and falling, slamming the ground with our rubbery, first-grade bodies, then doing it again, all while discussing *Star Wars*.

I was explaining what *Star Wars* meant to me:

“I love it more than anything,” I said.

“More than God?” said Harry.

“What? No one can love *Star Wars* more than God does.”

“No, I mean do you love *Star Wars* more than you love God?”

“God invented stars and war,” I said, “so loving *Star Wars* is like loving *him*, which he requires. In other words, I will not be entrapped by you, Harry.”

I didn’t say this, of course. I was too young. I thought it up years later, in adulthood, which is the point of adulthood. It’s that zone of relative strength from which we journey back into the caverns of childhood, showing up like big, bad brothers of our younger selves, born to fight for the family, and we conquer.

Anyway, my buddy and I swung on the swings, talked *Star Wars*, and we did other things kids did in those days. For example: When two swing-set kids caught each other’s swing rhythm in 1987 and their swings aligned, they hollered at each other, “Get out of my bathtub!” whatever that means. I didn’t know what it meant then, and I don’t know now. But I loved it, and I love it.

Harry and I got into each other’s bathtubs then got out again in the best way to get out of anything: We jumped out. We flew.

We hit that New England granite-packed ground and bounced. The slam knocked an old-timey “oof!” out of me, which I chased with a laugh. Harry’s slam knocked something out of him too:

It knocked the impossible out of him, which I chased with some impossible of my own, and he chased *that* with a miracle. You’ll see what I mean.

Here we go:

Harry hit the ground then said, “You know Han Solo’s gun?”

I said, “The DL-44 heavy blaster pistol manufactured by BlasTech Industries during the Galactic Republic years? *Know* it? When I die, though I don’t believe in death—”

“Me neither,” said Harry.

I grinned. “What’s death?”

We laughed at death.

“When I die,” I said, “I’m getting a DL-44 in heaven.”

“So, you know it?” said Harry.

“I was *born* knowing it. Everything else I’ve had to learn the hard way: by learning.”

“Well,” said Harry, “I have one. I have a blaster pistol. I have Han Solo’s real blaster pistol gun.”

“You have *WHAT?!*” I shouted.

While I was paralyzed by shock, he ran back to his swing, swung again, jumped again, and flew, and while he flew, he said, “I have Han Solo’s gun. It’s not something fake or untrue or anything like that. When I say I have it, I’m making a true statement. Believe me. I have it with me back in the classroom.”

This is when I performed the impossible thing I mentioned earlier:

I completely believed him.

But this feat of mine was effortless. When you’re six, it’s incredibly easy to believe a flying boy.

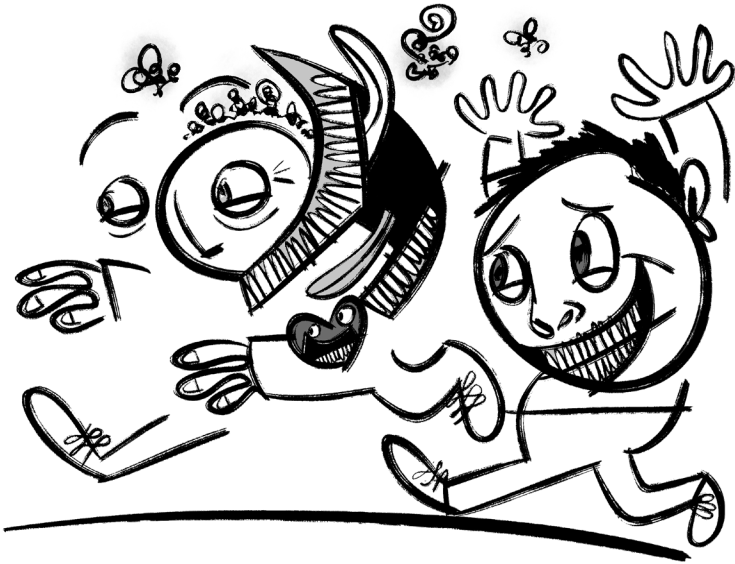
Harry landed. With grace, he struck granite, bounced, rolled, then stood up and said, “It is clear from your shock paralysis that you believe me. If what I said wasn’t true, I’d be faced with a choice right now: To tell the truth or commit to the lie out of fear or possibly a perverse desire to further manipulate and harm another human being. But, since what I said about the blaster *is* true, you have nothing to worry about.”

After that, it was time for the miracle.

Harry said, "You can have the blaster if you want."

My soul uttered a sound. The sound of a long-lost key turning in a long-lost lock. Within its treasure chest lay all longings fulfilled, all questions answered, all cares and terrors washed away, leaving behind a heart burning with happy idolatry.

It goes without saying that I became as alive as 50 living boys. Naturally, I gained abilities. I flicked my eyes to the school's bell. It rang. I flicked hot blood into my shock-frozen body, breaking the shock. I ran. Harry joined me, and we raced for the first-grade classroom, raced for his cubby, for my DL-44.



"Dear God, the Lord," I whispered, "I love you so much more than I love free blasters that are real, so I'm not going to hell, okay?"

God spoke: “If you love me so much, why have I never seen you run toward church with so much speed, excitement, and belief?”

“Because,” I said, aided by myself from the future, “church isn’t God.”

“Good,” said God. “You’ve learned everything you need to know. I can take you to heaven now if you like.”

“Actually, I’m good. I’ll just wait for heart disease like everyone else, if that’s all right by you.”

“Done.”

I remember perfectly what was going through my head on the way to the classroom: I imagined taking my blaster into the woods and blasting trees. I’d done similar things with a machete. I downed an entire young-growth forest of poplars. Dad knew it was me because all the stumps were about the height of a first grader with a machete. But if I knocked down forests with a blaster, no one would know it was me, because who on Earth but Harry and me would ever believe blasters are real?

As I ran and dreamed, I laughed. Harry laughed with me. And when I heard Harry’s laugh and saw the kindly shine in his eyes, I learned a great truth: Life is extremely good when you live it all by yourself, but it’s better with people. They tell you truths, they give you gifts, and they keep you from laughing alone.

We reached Harry’s cubby. It was full of papers, broken pencils, markers as dead as dry bones, a single Velcro shoe, a few G.I. Joe pelvises, and through it all, Harry dug and dug, and I believed and believed in my prize, and I had visions.

I saw the trees that would be my first bloods, the pines on my front lawn that made my hands sticky. Pitch trees. I couldn’t stop touching them, those sticky perverts. I imagined

slicing them with laser fire, leaving behind stumps smoking with remorse. And the forests primeval would watch and tremble.

Harry, digging and digging deep, suddenly stopped. “Oh no!” he said. Then he said, “Crap!”

But I was dreaming too hard to understand his words. I misunderstood them. I thought his “oh no!” meant, “oh no! I’m about to give away the greatest reason to live I have ever had,” and his “Crap!” meant, “Will my best friend, Dan, even need best friends for a decade or so while he lives in a laser-induced state of high functioning joy-madness?”

Harry went back to digging, wildly now, and I watched him dig, seeing exactly what he saw—nothing. Still, I hoped. I was so deep in hope, my gut had gathered up all my dreams and visions and compressed them into something better than pearls and diamonds. I grew in my belly a hunk of faith so blind it didn’t care at all about what it failed to see in that cubby.

Because the blaster was there.

It had to be.

“Shoot.” Harry stopped digging again. “I think I... I think I maybe lost it.”

Now my belly grew something else: a spider with freezing feet. It reached up and plucked one of my heart strings, yanked it back like a bow string and shot an arrow of doubt up into my brain’s pristine, tender, and trusting underbelly.

I tried to speak, to say, “You, Harry, are mistaken,” but all that came out was a gasp that smelled like a deflating soul.

Finally, I managed: “Lost?”

“Yeah,” he said. “IT WAS RIGHT HERE!!! Dang it!”

The trees of Maine breathed a sigh that smelled like oxygenated relief. My heart went molten in a blink then cooled to a lump of bone in another blink and fell into my gut, landing as heavily as fifty dead boys, sending dream shrapnel upward, strafing the brain's underbelly so hard it cut through to the jaded overbelly. My body spasmed. Every muscle tightened, locking me in place so fast and violently they cut off a portion of my memory right there, leaving a bit of me trapped in that moment forever.

I am 6 years old.

I am staring into a cubby full of trash.

I am hit so hard by doubt that though I still believe I'm getting my blaster, I only 98 percent believe it.

"KEEP DIGGING!" cries the 98. "It has to be there! *It has to!*"

And this might explain why today I am a person cursed with hope. Because in my deeps, there's a six-year-old boy locked in a memory cut off before its bitter conclusion.

That boy is still a believer.

Only 2 percent of him feels deception's sting. Only 2 percent of him has learned how to manage his expectations and never fully trust anyone again. The rest of him, the majority, believes his dream come true is buried only a few pencils and pages away.

He's that close.

*I am that close, forever.*

So, I go back. I visit that memory that has no ending yet, which means it's a cubby full of possibility. I visit. I stand beside myself, big bad brother to myself, and I say, "Don't give up, Harry." Never give up, my friend. Dig and dig some more, because you, me, and I know what we all know:

Our dream is true.  
Our dream is close.  
It simply *has to* be there. So, keep digging.



## About the Author

Dan Williams is a child rotting in time's river, a kid-thing bloated to adult-sized features, and he has no prospects. So, he teaches, writes stories, and draws people without their permission. His teachers called him unteachable; his preachers called him irredeemable; and his parents said, "Not everyone's going to be good at life."

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