

WinkWorld March - April 2006

by Dawn Wink
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"Ms. Wink! Ms. Wink! We have a question, but it's just for girls." Marissa, 7th grade, pulled on my elbow, as I leaned toward the table where two other young girls looked up at me eagerly. She sat down with her friends and looked up at me with big brown eyes and asked, "Can you get pregnant when you're breastfeeding?"

I leaped straight over whatever had prompted this and replied with a hearty, "Yes! You can, Marissa. It may be more difficult, but yes you can get pregnant while breastfeeding." Their eyes widened in confusion, and I babbled something about the urgency of continuing to pass out these reading comprehension dittos.

"But, Ms. Wink! Ms. Wink!" They called out from beyond me, and Marissa came scampering around to grab my elbow again and lead me back to the table. Now, all three girls looked at me in complete confusion.

"But, don't you need...a dad?"

Now, I stared back in bewilderment.

"Ah, yes, girls. You still need a man." I looked at their 12-year-old selves, "Or a boy."

We all stared at each other. They looked thoroughly confused. I was thoroughly confused. All of a sudden I had a thought. "Girls, are you asking me if breastfeeding itself can impregnate you?"

"What's impregnate?" All three asked in unison.

"Become pregnant. Are you asking me if by the sheer act of breastfeeding you can become pregnant?"

"Yes! Yes!" Excited nods now.

"Oh! No, girls, no, you can't. It still needs to happen in the, you know, normal way." I looked into their eyes, questioning, hoping we wouldn't be going into that discussion.

"Oh, okay." They smiled with looks of understanding and relief. I turned to continue passing out the reading comprehension test.

7th grade English had begun at De Vargas Junior High for the day.

I have been substitute teaching in the Santa Fe Public Schools as I work my way through the morass of updating my expired out-of-state California teaching license to current New Mexico licensure requirements. The pay is \$65 a day. With the cost of gas included and by the time taxes are taken out, I believe that has me working for next to nothing. However, it does provide a rich variety of experiences.

For example, yesterday in another 7th grade class in a different school, one boy entered the room and sat down. As soon as the whole class was seated and looking up at me, he began loudly muttering a string of the most vulgar profanity known to the Spanish language. The other kids giggled nervously. I sat in front of the room.

"Christián?" I said.

"¿Qué?" came back a surly reply, complete with dismissive head nod and curled back lip.

"En primer lugar, se dice '¿Mande Usted?', no se dice ¿Qué?" ("In first place, you say 'Excuse me?', not 'What?'" It is often difficult to capture the subtle nuances of a different language. Let's just say, how he responded is completely rude in Spanish.)

His eyebrows lifted and heads popped up all around the class to look at me.

"Y en segundo lugar, si usas estas maliciones dentro de este salon otra vez, vas a ir directamente a hablar con el director de la escuela. Y voy a hablar a tu mama personalmente" (And, in second place, if you continue using these profanities in this classroom, you will go to speak directly with the principal. And, I will call your mom personally.)

Silence descended upon the room.

"¿Me entiendes? (Do you understand me?)

A head nod.

As a class, we began reading a play about Rosa Parks.

About three minutes later Christián bursts out, a look of complete earnestness on his face this time, "Where are you from?"

A second example of amazing experiences took place when I spent a day subbing in a full-inclusion Special Education classroom at a local high school. What a learning experience for me. I had never been in this environment before. The kids within this community have a wide variety of challenges, including Turret's Syndrome, Down's, and some illnesses that cripple the body and challenge the mind that I wouldn't even try to identify.

Within these two adjoining classroom lives a community of challenges and love. I watched as students gently wiped the drool off of those who cannot move their bodies, speaking lovingly and playfully to them. I watched as other teachers tenderly worked with kids for whom life must be overwhelming. What struck me was the sense of caring, understanding, and acceptance that infused this community.

This day was a lesson in love and gratitude for me.

Spanish profanity that would make a sailor blush, questions about breastfeeding sexuality, and lessons in love.

Just another day subbing.