

# My shoe's not supposed to be on my head?

By Holly Lisle

Today I have had a couple of occasions to think of Jean Kerr, author of **Please Don't Eat The Daisies**, who once had to try to get an explanation from one of her small children about why he had eaten all the daisies out of her centerpiece shortly before a houseful of guests was to arrive.

At the moment, I'm in full sympathy mode. I have had precisely that sort of day.

I woke this morning to the sound of tearing paper. Methodical ripping, careful ripping, done patiently and with intent. I sat up, leaned over Matt, looked down in front of one of the bookcases. There sat the five year old, a book on his lap, paper scattered in little drifts around him. He was selectively removing pages and portions of pages from a book, an expression of irritation on his face. He was muttering.

I sat bolt upright and yelled, "What are you doing?!" and my child looked up at me, startled. And said, "I'm getting rid of these damned birds." Please realize, he lives in a bookish house. He is careful of books; he does not color in them, has never destroyed one. And yet today ...

The book he had on his lap was a baby name book, mostly text. Not the sort of book you'd expect to leave a five-year-old boy in a seething, muttering rage. In it were pictures of storks carrying babies. This particular child does not like birds; turns out he interpreted the pictures as birds **stealing** babies, and found this particularly offensive, and he was systematically removing each bird from the book and crumpling the picture up. He'd already taken one load of crumpled pictures to the trashcan when I caught him. How or why he had

chosen this task for seven o'clock this morning, I don't know. But I suspect it is because he is now five.

Five is a strange age, somewhere between babyhood and reason, where a child starts developing detailed theories on how the world works, and embracing these theories with the utter certainty only possible for people who only **have** one theory on any subject, and no idea yet that there might be alternative explanations.

Five.

We went to the bookstore later today, and he was reciting the don'ts. "We don't fart in public," he said loudly when we were in the music section. "Right," I agreed, marvelling at how well a child's voice can carry at inopportune moments. "We don't run in the store," he said even more loudly, watching two children – whose parents apparently have lower standards – rocketing through the aisles at warp speeds. "Right," I said.

We stood in the children's section, looking at a stack of books that someone had torn pages out of. "We don't tear pages out of books," he said to the clerk, and she nodded grimly, and he looked at me to make sure that he'd gotten this one right, or perhaps just to decide whether I knew what I was talking about or not, since obviously SOMEONE tore pages out of books. "No," I assured him. "We don't."

We wandered into the writing section. I was looking for a book for my nineteen-year-old daughter, holding my son's hand and perusing the shelves. He'd been jumping in place. They get the Energy Booster Option on their fifth birthday, something you forget if you haven't had a five-year-old in the house in a while. I told him not to jump. So he stood still for eleven seconds, and then started figeting, turning from one side to the other, then hanging from my arm and sort of swinging. I told him not to do that. He stood still for another, oh, fourteen seconds. Then I felt him start tugging at my hand

again, but the rhythm was different than when he was jumping, the angle different than when he was hanging, the movement different than when he was twisting. I looked down. He was standing on one foot, scratching his head with his other foot, hanging onto my hand for balance. His sneaker was moving back and forth through his hair. I had no words – no words at all. I was making eeping noises. When I stared at him, my mouth hanging open, he gave me a sheepish grin and put his foot down.

Five. I am left wondering what things I will forget to tell him not to do tomorrow.

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