

# Have you ever won anything?

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**H**ave you ever won anything?

I went to a lovely school in Oklahoma City.

D.D. Kirkland (maybe Kirtland—no, I just did The Google, and it's Kirkland, like I thought!) Elementary School.

Memories fade, of course, but Mom had died. Mike had been sent to Grandpa and Grandma's, Kelley to Aunt Jeanne and Aunt Barb's. Grandpa and Grandma wanted all three of us. Dad wouldn't send all three to spite them. He only sent Mike—well, that's a different story.

I don't even recall ever having met Uncle Bob, never mind any of the rest of his family, prior to being sent there. I don't recall the drive, the transfer, settling in. None of that. Maybe because it had to have involved some trauma—I mean, six years old. Mean Dad—of course I knew that even then. Dead Mom. Strange, totally alien surroundings. Same with the new family, of course.

I remember my first-grade class being in a circle, taking turns reading a page out of the Dick and Jane reader.

I couldn't read.

I'd just try and guess, by noting which page we were on and which page, based on the number of students between me and whoever read, which page might fall to me, and memorize it. The reader didn't have enough pages so that every kid could read a new one, so pages got repeated.

Even that failed.

I knew my letters, though. And I remember walking home from school with my first report card. Back then, kids actually did walk to school--occasionally, I drive past Chamiza or Marie Hughes when school gets out and I am still amazed how nearly every single kid is picked up by their parents.

But back to the report card. I did know my letters (and had probably made some good progress on the reading front by that time, too). I pulled it out, looked at it, and thought, "I hope F's are good, 'cuz I sure got a lot of those!"

I'll add that when I got moved back to Colorado in the wake of Dad's second marriage, this during second grade, the school sent a report that I should be put in gifted classes. So apparently I got better! And this is another mark of a good school--the same teacher who made me write one-hundred times "I will not play in mud puddles" recommended me for those gifted classes.

Uncle Bob looked at that report card, shook his head, and said, "Oh, Dougy." I'm sure he felt disappointment. But he also understood.

Anyway, the school had book fairs. I don't know if book fairs were a big deal to you or to Marie Hughes, but they were a huge deal to me! I loved books. I loved the way new books smelled. Back then, very few (to wit, I think none) of the books sold to families and kids at school book fairs came in paperback.

All nice, hard, covers. That smelled good. And had pictures.

Plus, not just book fairs, but fair fairs! Teachers and parents and kids and administrators all showing up, Contests, costumes, games. Quite a world for a six-year-old!

Anyway, maybe in the gym, the cafeteria, probably the gym, but perhaps somewhere else entirely, I found myself standing on a square which was arranged with other squares all in a circle. I had no idea what the gig was; maybe Suzie or Francie or Aunt Jo told me to stand there, assuming I'd catch on from there.

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Anyway, somebody put the needle on a record and music started. Wish I knew which song--I do remember songs from back then! But not that one. Maybe it was Downtown by Petula Clark. Still like that song! Or maybe it was a kid's song. Not the Barney song. That didn't exist yet.

And once the song started, whoever was next to me, clockwise or counterclockwise not sure which, indicated that I needed to start moving, stepping on each subsequent square.

Okay.

Eventually, the music stopped. Probably the same person who put the needle ON the record took the needle OFF. And everyone stopped on the square nearest to them.

As did I. And as I stood there, looking around, wondering what came next, a woman stood in front of me. Holding a carrot cake.

Which she extended in my direction.

Well, what the heck? I looked at her. I looked at the cake.

Someone said, "That cake is yours. You won the cakewalk!"

At that time in my life, winning that carrot cake was the best thing I think that could have happened to me. I took hold of that cake like it was all the gold in the world. I've won this and that since then, but wow. When I felt small and afraid and alone, I won a cake.

Carrot cake is my favorite cake to this day!