

CRAZY JOSH
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The Biggest, Baddest Sixth Grade Class



An e-Book Excerpt From

No Labels, No Limits!

Healing Today's Children:

Lessons from A TurnAround Specialist

MARY ROBINSON REYNOLDS

Although this story is an accurate description of a true case study by a TurnAround Specialist, the child's name and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individual. The advice given in this book is not intended to take the place of treatment by health professionals as needed, such as physicians and psychologists.

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The Biggest, Baddest Sixth Grade Class

I had just been hired at my second school, in what would be my third year of teaching. For the first time, I was to teach just one grade level—the sixth grade. But this was anything but your ordinary sixth grade! I was hired because of my reputation as a “high-functioning disciplinarian” and it was true that kids didn’t get away with anything in my class. Although the administrators may have assumed that I was a traditional disciplinarian, in fact, I wasn’t. I had achieved the results that administrators were looking for in a new way, one that they didn’t understand. Since results were what they were seeking, I was hired on the spot.

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This particular class required someone with stamina, because, as I was told during the interview, these were “the worst bunch of kids ever in the history of this school.” I asked when this bad behavior had begun and they replied, “In kindergarten!” This crew of juvenile “angry misfits” had allegedly behaved so badly that they frightened every teacher who had worked with them for the last six years. And not only was I supposedly inheriting the worst bunch of kids, I was also getting Crazy Josh, as the teachers had privately named him. He was a sixth-grader, blind in one eye and deaf in one ear.

But Josh hadn’t yet come face to face with my “Magic”! That was my stock in trade. One reason why I had so much success with children, and why I was becoming a very good TurnAround Specialist, was that I had been given so many negative labels as a kid. No matter how hard I tried, they stuck. So I had a certain deep empathy with all of the children. And, moreover, it made me downright stubborn and determined to prove all of the other teachers wrong. I admit that I definitely had an

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attitude toward all the other teachers, but at that young age, I really didn't care what they thought. The prospect of proving them wrong thrilled me.

I suppose this was one way I tried to heal what my parents had unknowingly done with me, in labeling me so negatively. When you're convinced that you are *less than*, it's important to learn that you can choose to do it differently. That's a significant lesson for all of us, to know that we all have within us the intuitive and empathetic understanding of how to turn things around.

On the first day of school, the sixth grade kids walked in, acting as if they were indeed the "biggest and baddest." They wanted to be sure that I knew just how bad they were! I knew all right, and I also knew that I was going to have to play this "straight, clean and right down to the line." I was going to have to remain mentally disciplined and prevent negative labels from entering my mind. Whenever a teacher would tell me bad things about certain kids, or this group in particular, I would

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deliberately develop "selective amnesia." This class needed my *vision* for them, despite themselves.

When school began, the first thing the kids wanted to know was if I had "heard about them." Now that was an understatement! But instead of answering their question, I asked them what they thought I'd been told and, word for word, they confirmed the information I had been given by the staff. Then I gave them a pep talk to beat all pep talks. I began by telling them that I didn't believe a word I had been told, and that by Christmas, they would have forgotten all about it too. They hooted; obviously they didn't believe me. Being the biggest, baddest class this school had ever seen was their identity. It made them special, and they couldn't see any other way to distinguish themselves in any positive way.

Although they appeared proud of their reputation, I knew that it hurt their hearts terribly to be told over and over again how bad they were. I could feel it in my soul, and I could tell they wanted to find a way out. However,

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they didn't yet trust me to lead them to a better place and certainly could not believe in themselves or their goodness. So, I was going to have to prove myself and help them to develop self-trust.

Now, seated at a desk in the middle of the classroom was an undersized, gangly boy whose behavior was outlandish. Whenever I'd walk over to talk to him, he'd turn off his hearing aide and screw up his face, in an effort to look just as crazy as he could. I smiled at him and asked him his name. He was surprised that I didn't already know it. Of course I knew it; nobody but a kid nicknamed "Crazy Josh" would be acting like this. But, with my decision to develop a case of "selective amnesia," I was attitudinally clean. I acted as though he were a stranger and that I was glad to be getting acquainted with him as his new teacher.

I could tell that this surprised him and threw him off guard. He didn't know how to react to my acceptance of him, so he responded with more crazy behavior. I

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smiled, mentally sent him some love vibes, and continued to converse with him as if he were acting in a perfectly normal manner.

That's all I did—repeatedly. It would simply take some time, and some gentle loving to move him out of the crazy act. Instead of being resistant to his outlandish behavior, I was inclusive, pulling him into the class and the activities. Yet whenever he became frustrated with the work, he would revert to his crazy actions.

Instead of addressing Josh's outrageous behavior, I concentrated on his frustration with the task. That's all. Because his behavior was so noticeably disruptive, it was hard for his previous teachers to ignore. So they dealt with the behavior, and had no energy left to work on the underlying cause. The result was mutual dislike and constant discord. In fact, by fifth grade, Josh's classroom tolerance had diminished to the place where he couldn't handle the teacher's intolerance of him. By the end of that school year, he would implode and explode two to

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three times per week. He would be reprimanded and sent home or sent to a special education teacher.

Resistance and *rejection* are the most hurtful techniques we can use to try to curb bad behavior. And yet it's so easy for teachers or parents to slip into these modes of control. They will never be successful because they aim to suppress behavior, not deal with its causes. However by assessing the situation and ferreting out underlying causes of the behavior, it's possible to find a way to erase the source. If you can do that successfully, the unacceptable behavior will disappear.

There's no doubt that his was a challenging case, but I made up my mind that before the school year was out, that he would be mainstreamed back into the classroom, full time and fully functional.

It took about nine long weeks of trials, tests, and tribulations, but I won the whole class over. I was

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determined and stubborn enough to pull it off. Maybe I loved them because they were all so much like me at that age.

By February, Josh no longer wanted to go to Special Ed because he didn't want to miss out on what we were doing together in the classroom. He had only one episode — an angry burst of temper — and he asked to go home for the afternoon. The rest of the time he experienced what it felt like to be included as one of the kids in his classroom.

Six years later, I received the graduation pictures from the small town paper. All the kids looked great, but Josh had grown up to be quite handsome. Not only was I delighted to see that this boy was a graduate, but I admit there were tears in my eyes when I read of his scholarship to attend the nearby community college.

You can't have an attitude and keep it a secret!

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Josh was a child whose life was threatened by a powerful label and the negative attitudes of those around him. He was “crazy” and was among “the baddest of the bad.” So, as a self-fulfilling prophecy, his behavior kept matching the label. It’s no wonder his teachers held a negative attitude toward him! But some adult had to step in and break the cycle.

When we get in touch with our attitude, beliefs and resistances about any challenging situation we may be dealing with, we, ourselves, will be transformed. And when we are personally transformed, we set new energy in motion that will instantaneously affect the lives of those whom we touch, whether they are in the same room with us or half way around the world. A shift in attitudinal energy is felt: your message has been sent, and received!