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# LADYBUGS

## BY BETHANY BURMASTER

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"Look! There are hundreds over here!" I cried.

Alex smiled and ran over, pushing the red plastic wheelbarrow in front of him. He sat down by the tree and gazed around the trunk. "Wow! There must be a zillion of them!" he yelled.

"You just stand here and make sure they don't get out, and I'll catch them!" I yelled to Alex. I thought it was my duty to be bossy, since I was three years older than he was. I was, of course, much more mature and able to handle all situations. I sat on the hard ground and picked up the tiny creatures. I pulled them out of the tufts of grass and weeds. I stopped them as they climbed up the trunk of the tree. One at a time, I caught them and placed them gently in the plastic wheelbarrow.

Alex sat on the ground. His face hovered over the tiny creatures, and he watched as they crawled up the sides. Occasionally, he yelled at them, telling them to stay in the wheelbarrow. After a while, Alex began whining about how boring his job was, so we switched places. I may have been older, but the "ladybug tree" was in Alex's backyard, so the power had to be evenly distributed.

I sat by the wheelbarrow and hung my head over the ladybugs. After watching the ladybugs for about twenty minutes, the muscles in the back of my neck became sore. I just continued to slide the ladybugs down the sides of the wheelbarrow and back to the bottom. The ladybugs didn't seem to mind crawling around in the toy; they rarely flew away.

After a couple of hours, the entire bottom of the wheelbarrow was covered. Alex and I decided that we had gathered a sufficient number of ladybugs for the day. We played with the bugs for a while, letting them crawl up our arms and watching with sad or sometimes angry eyes as a few flew away. We had big plans for the ladybugs. For our enterprising minds, just letting them crawl up our arms and stand on our fingertips was not enough.

I had once heard that ladybugs were helpful in gardens because they kept away other insects that were more destructive. Alex and I also found the ladybugs to be extremely cute. For the aforementioned reasons, we of course thought that people would want to buy the ladybugs. So, we agreed to sell them. This was not the first, nor was it the last in our series of childhood enterprises. We tried to sell everything, including the snacks that Alex's mother, my babysitter, gave us. It was not the thought of earning money that intrigued us; it was the idea of success and achievement. We were sure that, unlike our other ideas, our ladybug sale would be successful.

"Come in for lunch!" Alex's mother, Sharon, screamed.

We told our ladybugs not to escape and went inside. We were the oldest children Sharon watched, so we had our "grown-up" business conversation over lunch. We talked about how we would sell the ladybugs that day. We decided it was time to choose a name for

our business. We wanted something original, creative, and catchy. To our young minds, "Ladybugs 'R' Us" seemed to fit the criteria. Even though we had not sold a single ladybug, the addition of this "original" name really helped the business take off in our minds.

After we ate lunch, we ran through the back door into the fresh air. We took the wheelbarrow and pushed it around to the front of the house, then to the end of the driveway. Filled with pride in our new name, we were sure to sell a ladybug or two.

"Ladybugs for sale; only ten cents each!" Alex and I both screamed at the passing cars.

A little boy with blonde hair came down the street on his bike. I knew who he was, but Alex knew him better than I did. He always seemed kind of loud and obnoxious to me. I hoped that if the boy didn't buy a ladybug, he would at least not see us, and just keep walking toward the playground. Remaining unseen was impossible, though; Alex's house was directly across the street from the playground.

"Hey guys!" The blonde boy yelled, "Whatcha doin'?"

"We're selling ladybugs," I answered.

"Why would you wanna do that?" the boy wrinkled his nose as he asked us.

"It's fun!" Alex yelled back.

"It sounds pretty stupid. Let me try it," he said as he marched toward Alex's driveway.

The little brat butted right in to "help" us, as did many of the neighborhood friends that came and visited us while we sold the ladybugs. Luckily, like the other kids, he soon got bored.

"This is stupid! I'm goin' to the playground. Let me take a ladybug for free since I helped you guys," the little boy said.

"O.k., here's a really big one," Alex said as he handed a ladybug to the blonde kid. I didn't think that letting him take one made good business sense, but I decided I would rather have the little brat leave than argue with him.

After he left, Alex and I continued trying to sell the ladybugs. It was starting to rain, so we let all of the ladybugs out of the wheelbarrow and put them under the tree. Then we went inside. We couldn't leave the bugs in the wheelbarrow; we had to start each morning by catching them.

We decided to draw for a while, our legs were tired and we just wanted to sit down. Alex and I both enjoyed drawing, almost as much as selling things. We got out a big box of markers. We drew all kinds of pictures, some of ladybugs. While we created our artwork, we discussed the future of our business.

"Maybe we should yell louder," Alex suggested. We decided we would.

"Are you trying to sell those things again?" Alex's mother asked us from the living room. We told her that we were, and described how successful we thought our business would be. She just laughed and said "o.k...." She never seemed very enthusiastic about her son's ambition, but she was glad when we went outside. She was left alone to watch her soap opera, or her "story" as she liked to call it.

I came home that evening and told my parents the same things Alex and I had told Sharon. My parents certainly laughed to themselves, but they encouraged my enthusiasm and ambition. They were proud of my creativity and did not want to stifle it.

I returned to Alex's house the next day. We watched TV in the morning until Sharon yelled "why don't you go outside and get the stink blown off 'ya?" I never thought Alex or I smelled bad, and I thought it was a rather rude expression, but we still went outside eagerly.

That day, I pushed the wheelbarrow to the tree and Alex began to capture the creatures. Again, we filled the bottom of the red wheelbarrow with ladybugs, and again we pushed it

to the end of the driveway. Today we yelled louder, but it got us sore throats, not extra dimes in our pockets. We took a break to swim and eat lunch, and then we headed back to the end of the driveway.

After about ten minutes, I realized that Alex wasn't as much of an optimist as I thought. It suddenly was clear that Alex had inherited some of his mother's pessimism. Before, we'd always just continued down our road to success as Sharon watched her soaps, but today was different.

"This is dumb!" Alex suddenly exclaimed.

"No it's not!" I screamed back. How could he possibly think this was dumb? After we had worked so hard?

"No one wants to buy any stupid ladybugs!"

"Yes they do, if they only knew how nice the ladybugs were, people would buy them," I said.

I knew people would buy the ladybugs. I knew that if the "ladybug tree" wasn't in Alex's own backyard, he would be enticed to spend a dime on one of the lovely little, polka-dotted creatures. Alex took the wheelbarrow.

"Stop!" I yelled, "I still want to sell them!"

"Too bad, they're mine! This is my driveway, and my wheelbarrow, and my tree! I don't want to sell the ladybugs anymore!" Alex yelled, his face was red, and he had tears running down his cheeks.

"Stop being such a baby," I told him. "If we want to sell any, we need to keep trying." I was suddenly reminded that he was only about six and much more childish than I was.

Alex was upset, and he blamed me. He may have discovered the ladybug tree, but I had envisioned "Ladybugs 'R' Us," so he thought it was my fault. I guess he forgot that we both had caught the ladybugs, we both had screamed at passersby, and we both had thought of names and business ideas. We had both invested much of our summer into Ladybugs 'R' Us. I thought it was too early to give up on our investment, but Alex was ready to sell.

Alex turned with tears in his eyes, and ran, pushing the wheelbarrow ahead of him. I thought for a moment. Then, once he'd had a few moments to calm down, I decided to walk to the backyard and try to talk some sense back into him.

When I got to the backyard, I saw that Alex had not calmed down; he was in a fit of rage. He was holding onto the garden hose and spraying the poor little ladybugs.

"Stop! You're hurting them!" I cried.

"Good. I hate ladybugs!"

"Don't, they'll drown!" Now we were both crying. I could not believe how cruel he was or how enraged a six-year-old could be. Alex wasn't just killing the ladybugs; he was killing all of our hopes and dreams from that summer. I felt like I was drowning, not just the ladybugs.

I went home and felt depressed. I tried to read, then I tried to watch television, but I kept thinking about "Ladybugs 'R' Us". I decided that I would try to get Alex interested in the enterprise again. I was determined.

The next day, when I went to Alex's house, he wasn't angry with me anymore. But, it still seemed too soon to bring up the ladybugs, so we played other games. After a few days, we were catching ladybugs again. I am not sure exactly how or why we re-started our business, except that, without this task, both of us felt like a part of our summer was missing.

Every day for the rest of the summer we continued to try to sell ladybugs. We made signs and we collected old cardboard jewelry boxes to place the ladybugs in once they were

sold. We only sold about five ladybugs all summer, a few to our parents and the parents of other children at the daycare, and a few to neighborhood children.

Our business closed down once school resumed and the leaves began to turn. The reward for our perseverance was not pockets full of dimes, or the feeling of being the coolest kids in town; it was our memories. Our time by the tree and at the end of Alex's driveway was not wasted. Money would have been quickly lost to candy and toys, but I was sure that the lesson of perseverance and creativity would last for a long time. This was confirmed the following summer, when Alex found a baby tree growing in the yard and yelled, "Beth! Come here quick! Maybe we can sell these!"

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