



Working Vocabularies

Thirty-Word Dog

A few years back, one of the professors at the school where I taught proclaimed that Nathan, her two-year-old, had a working vocabulary of twenty-five words. I wasn't quite sure how I was supposed to respond. It was certainly a novel thing to note—so precise and definitive—a celebration of some sort of verbal benchmark. She seemed quite pleased, so I smiled and noted that she and her husband did indeed have a bright boy.

That night I checked out Griffin's working vocabulary—it was thirty words. Griffin is a year or two older than Nathan, but I figured I was in possession of a remarkable bit of news. Probably should have kept it to myself. Probably should have just let it slide—didn't.

At the first opportunity, I informed my colleague that Griffin's vocabulary was thirty words. I think I caught her a bit by surprise. She knows Griffin, and after a moment's reflection she congratulated me on that remarkable accomplishment and changed the subject. I felt a bit

Something to Chew on

When making comparisons, remember that someone always comes out with the short stick, and not everyone wants to play catch with it.



Thirty-Word Dog



uneasy after our conversation, sensing that I'd stepped over some invisible boundary seen only by parents of actual children.

That little boy is now in the third grade, and his working vocabulary is well beyond numbering—he is indeed a bright boy. Griffin, on the other hand, is still in possession of the same thirty-word vocabulary. Turns out he's pretty smart too—for a dog. He's even done a couple of bit parts for Disney, playing Old Yeller.

At this point, let me ease any parental discomfort you may be experiencing. I know a dog is not a child. The theological reality is that one has a spirit and the other doesn't. One is an image-bearer of the Creator, and the other merely a reflection. One has eternity set in his or her heart, and the other has only a vague ache it shares with all creation. Still, the working vocabularies of life can be gleaned both from those who crawl on all fours as well as those who walk on all fours.



Thirty-Word Dog



Paws for Prayer

Father, remind me that my true significance is never found in comparing myself to others. Amen.

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom.... But let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.

Jeremiah 9:23–24 NIV



The difference between children and puppies is that children grow up.

—W. C. Fields





The Best Laid Plans of Boys and Jackrabbits

The Tale of the Texas Jackrabbit

Every family has them. They are impossible to escape, often embarrassing, seldom new, and usually greeted with, “Come on! Not that again!” You can’t really be a family without them—you wouldn’t want to be. It is the narrative thread that defines a collection of folks as family, a special blend of stories and observations that shapes and secures your place in this world. It is likely the most potent thing we pass from one generation to the next.

Next time you’re at a family gathering, just listen. It won’t be long before someone is reminded of a well-worn story that everyone knows by heart. That’s the thing about family narratives—we know them by heart, because that’s where we keep them.

I can’t think about my dad for long without picturing him spinning one of his tales about growing up in the Texas Panhandle. He lived in an era of small towns and wide open spaces. He had a big old bloodhound named Carlos that loved two things—keeping him company and chasing jackrabbits.

Now despite all the tales about Texas whoppers, a healthy jackrabbit can top thirty pounds and hit thirty miles an hour with

Something to Chew on

The humiliating moments of life are often a source of laughter when seasoned over time.



The Tale of the Texas Jackrabbit



great regularity. They can also run circles around most hounds.

One day Dad’s dog was hot on the trail of a Texas-size jack when both of them disappeared into one of the many draws that crisscross the high plains. Dad knew that particular draw curved back on itself right next to where he was standing. So he figured he’d just drop down into that narrow gully and catch himself a rabbit. He hunkered down, coiling his nine-year-old frame, ready to spring. He could hear the sounds of the chase coming his way and could almost taste stewed

jackrabbit as he waited on the other side of a blind corner.

The jackrabbit was running for all he was worth, drifting up the sandy sides of that miniature canyon with each twist and turn. He never saw my dad—

didn’t slow by so much as a whisker.

That jack hit Dad right in the stomach and proceeded to thump his head with both hind feet. It left him winded, sprawled, and semiconscious on the floor of the draw.

Dad was just beginning to appreciate how humiliating (and painful) it was to be run over by a rabbit when he heard



The Tale of the Texas Jackrabbit



the deep, throaty howl of his approaching hound echoing off the next bend in the draw. What happened next gave Dad a whole new appreciation of the phrase “roadkill.”



Paws for Prayer

*O Father, when I'm winded and flat
on my back, remind me that this moment
is not the whole story. Amen.*

There is ... a time to weep and a
time to laugh, a time to mourn
and a time to dance.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 NIV



Mutterings

*Experience is a hard
teacher because she gives
the test first, the
lesson afterwards.*

—Vernon Law

