

The Story
of
Flat boy



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Mrs. Jones had just given birth to a baby boy. Mr. Jones was very happy. He hugged his wife in her hospital bed. Their happy smiles turned into worried frowns, though, when their doctor walked in. He had such a serious look on his face!

"Is there a problem, doctor?" asked Mr. Jones.

"I am afraid so," said the sad-looking doctor. "There's no easy way to tell you this. I'm just going to say it straight. Your baby boy is flat."

"Flat?" asked Mrs. Jones. "You mean he has flat feet, or a flat nose?"

"No, Mrs. Jones," answered the doctor. "He's completely flat. Like a gingerbread man, only flatter. Why, he's no thicker than a piece of paper."



"He didn't get that from my side of the family!" said a flustered Mrs. Jones.

"Are you sure?" asked Mr. Jones. "I always thought your grandmother was very thin."

"Listen, you two," interrupted the doctor. "It's nobody's fault. You're just going to have to make the best of it. Raising a flat boy won't be easy."

"What problems will we have?" asked Mrs. Jones.

"Well, mostly you'll have to be very, very careful with him," answered the doctor. "Don't let him be bent, folded, or stapled. Be extremely cautious taking him outside on a windy day. That sort of thing."

The boy's parents took him home. After their shock wore off, they grew to love him. They named him Willie. But everybody else just called him Flatboy.

Flatboy's parents took care of him the best way they knew how. After a lot of trial and error, they figured out how to make flat little clothes for him—like a paper doll.



When he grew old enough to crawl, they made a playpen out of a hoola-hoop and let him move around inside it. It kept him from slipping under the furniture or under the door.



Flatboy couldn't throw or catch a ball. His parents gave him a penny to kick around. When he got bigger, they gave him a checker. He was an active child. He wanted his hair cut in a flat top, but his mother said no.

When he was six years old, Flatboy's parents sent him to a special school. It was called "School for the Depth-challenged." Only flat children were allowed to go there. Special teachers took care of them. Flatboy liked being on the school's checker-soccer team.

Despite his parent's love, Flatboy had his problems. For one thing, when he played hard, he could get some nasty rips. A little glue usually helped. He also couldn't get his flat little mouth around most food, unless it was very flat, too. After a while, Flatboy mostly lived on potato chips.

People who weren't used to flat children caused problems, too. Sometimes they would stare. It was embarrassing. Other times they wouldn't believe he was alive. Once, in a restaurant, the waitress threw him away with the napkins. When his parents pulled him out of the trash, Flatboy was covered with ketchup. It was a tense moment.

The neighborhood children used to tease him. One time they asked Mrs. Jones if Flatboy could come out to fly kites. When he came outside, though, they tied a tail and string to his flat little body and flew him. He almost got caught in a tree. Once again, his faithful parents came to the rescue.





But those problems, as bad as they seemed, weren't the worst. Mr. and Mrs. Jones finally had to admit that Flatboy just didn't know how to love people very much. Part of the problem probably was his flatness. Being flat, he couldn't turn his head to listen. His eyes were always focused straight ahead. It seemed that all the flat children were very selfish. They hardly looked at each other, except when they were right in each others' faces. Their minds were just on their own activities.

Worst of all, though, Flatboy's parents had to admit that they had no real relationship with their son. It just seemed like he felt it was too hard. It was too hard to look at them. It was too hard to listen to them. It was too hard to get his mind off of soccer and onto others whom he really couldn't see.

One day, Mr. Jones read a newspaper story about a Great Doctor who had had some amazing success helping flat children. The Joneses decided to take Flatboy to see the Great Doctor.

In the exam room, the Great Doctor looked at Flatboy carefully. He watched Flatboy running around in his own little world. He heard Flatboy whine for a checker to kick. He noticed that Flatboy didn't listen to his parents or look at them. He saw how Flatboy ignored everyone in the room.

Finally, the Great Doctor bent low, with his mouth inches from the boy's ear.

"Young man!" the Great Doctor said. His voice was firm and strong, but kind. "If you want me to help you, you must listen, really listen! Do you want my help?"



Flatboy stopped his running. He stopped whining. After a moment, he nodded his little head.

"Good!" said the Great Doctor. "Then you must look at me. I know it's hard. I know your little eyes are naturally focused on your own flat, little world. But you must try. Look to me!"

Slowly, with much concentration and some pain, Flatboy turned his eye towards the Great Doctor as far as it would go. For the first time in his short life, Flatboy looked up. He looked up into the wise, gentle face of the doctor.

"Wonderful!" said the Great Doctor. "Now, will you let me fill you, so you will stop being flat and start living a real life? Think before you answer! You'll have to change. You'll have to stop caring about just yourself. You'll have to learn to love others, learn to share. You'll have to listen to and look at people, not just your own little world. Shall I fill you?"

A tear filled the little boy's eye, and he nodded.

The Great Doctor bent even lower, and breathed into the boy's mouth and nose. Slowly, the boy began to inflate like a balloon. Once he was just the right size—a Flatboy no more!—the Great Doctor stopped.



The first thing the boy did was hug and thank the Great Doctor. The second thing was to hug and thank his parents.

"Get this boy some clothes and food!" the Great Doctor ordered with a smile. "Take him home and start a new life together!"

That's exactly what Mr. and Mrs. Jones did. They gave him a new name—lots of them. Sometimes they called him Willie, other times Son. Sometimes they called him Champion, and sometimes they called him Winner. But no one ever called him Flatboy again!

Because the boy ate real food now, he grew stronger and stronger. He could play with other real children, and he learned to love them deeply. He could tell other flat children how the Great Doctor had helped Him.

Best of all, though,
he could climb up in his
parents' laps, look them
straight in the eye, and
tell them how much he
loved them!



