

Life Lessons

by  
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CHARACTERS

DAD - Easygoing, hands-off, sensible parent.

KID - Curious, honest, never petulant.

Because of my own predilections, this was written for a father and daughter. It can be easily changed to a son, or a mother, in any combination. (Feel free to change names in the dialogue to "Mom" or "young man".)

Kid is written as a precocious six year old, but can be as old as ten. Younger is funnier.

SETTING

A grocery store, present. On stage: a lottery ticket machine. (Best low-budget solution: a cardboard box with a person inside.)

SYNOPSIS

A father tries to use a lottery ticket dispenser as a teachable moment for his daughter - but life isn't doing him any favors.

INT. GROCERY STORE

A CASHIER speaks over the PA system.

CASHIER (O.S.)

Shoppers, all deli items are now ten cents off a pound. Head to the deli for some great deals.

DAD and KID carry on their bags. Kid sees the lottery ticket dispenser.

KID

Hey Dad! Can I have a dollar for a lottery ticket?

DAD

What?

KID

In the machine.

DAD

Oh! I thought you meant the Powerball or something. What are these, scratch offs?

KID

I don't know. Can I get one?

Dad hems and haws.

DAD

I don't know. It's kind of a waste of money. I guess you could learn something about making bets.

Dad digs out a dollar. Kid slips it into the machine.

KID

I want that one.

DAD

Push the button. Take your ticket. Now. What does it say on the bottom?

KID

"Odds of winning 1 in 20".

DAD

Right. That means if you bought twenty tickets, one would win. Does that sound like this ticket is probably going to win?

KID

Let's see.

Kid starts scratching.

CASHIER (O.S.)  
Stan, clean up, aisle fifteen.

DAD  
I just don't want you to get disappointed.

KID  
What's this mean?

DAD  
You need a dollar sign. That's a wheelbarrow. You lost.

KID  
Oh.

DAD  
There are four more, you can scratch off those-

KID  
OK.

Kid keeps scratching.

DAD  
See, you really don't win by playing these things. You shouldn't get the idea that you'll ever-

KID  
Hey I won!

DAD  
What?  
(checks)  
Hey, you did.

KID  
What'd I win?

DAD  
Scratch off this box down here. That's exciting, huh?

KID  
"Free ticket."

DAD  
That means you can give them the ticket at the counter, and they'll give you a new ticket.

KID  
Let's go get it!

Oh, uh-  
DAD

Kid runs off. Dad is weighted down  
with groceries. Calling:

DAD  
-listen, we really have to get home. Why don't you save it  
for another day?

CASHIER (O.S.)  
Manager to customer service, please.

DAD  
I don't think you're supposed to really get the tickets  
yourself. It says you have to be over eighteen. OK? OK -  
they gave you one? Well, all right.

Kid returns.

KID  
They gave me a dollar.

DAD  
Oh, great!

KID  
I was supposed to get a free ticket.

DAD  
Well, I guess they expect that you'll put the dollar in the  
machine and get a new ticket.

KID  
Oh, OK.

DAD  
But - wait! You don't have to do that.

KID  
But I got a free ticket.

DAD  
Sure, but you could keep the dollar, too. A free dollar for  
whatever you want.

KID  
I can do whatever I want with it?

DAD  
Sure!

KID  
I want a free ticket.

DAD

OK but-

(Kid has already slipped the  
dollar into the machine.)

OK, sure. You know, this is a good life lesson. Because,  
see, you might win once in a while, but you won't break even.

KID

What's that mean, "break even"?

DAD

Well, if you keep playing, you'll lose more money than you  
win. That's how lotteries and casinos work.

KID

Hey, I won again!

DAD

Really?

KID

Yeah! Look, a money bag, this time I won a dollar.

DAD

Huh.

KID

Is that it?

DAD

No. You can scratch off the others. But there's probably  
only one prize per ticket.

KID

Another dollar. Another dollar. Another dollar. Another  
dollar. Five dollars!

DAD

OK. Great! Maybe you should-

KID

I'll go get the money.

DAD

Uh-

(Kid walks off.)

OK. Good. Well, that's something. You were pretty lucky,  
there.

CASHIER (O.S.)

Stan? You still got the register key? I need it again.

Kid returns with five dollars.

KID

I'm going to play again.

DAD

OK, wait, hang on. Maybe you should slow down.

KID

Why?

DAD

The odds that you'll keep winning are really, really low.

KID

I won before. Maybe I'm lucky right now.

DAD

See, that's actually not true. That's called the gambler's fallacy. Just because something happened, doesn't mean it'll happen again. Sometimes gamblers, people who gamble, think they're "hot".

KID

What's "hot"?

DAD

It's like a lucky streak. They think since they're winning, they're going to keep winning.

KID

That what I'm having! A lucky streak.

DAD

No, but lucky streaks aren't real. They don't exist. Wait-  
(Kid feeds the five dollar bill  
into the machine.)

Oh. Well. See, this machine doesn't even give change.

KID

That's OK. I'll play five times.

DAD

All right-

KID

Wait - what are these? I can buy one ticket for five dollars.

DAD

Why not?

KID

Is that better?

DAD  
I don't know.

KID  
I think it's better.

Kid buys one ticket. She scratches it off.

DAD  
I just don't want you to get the wrong impression from this experience.

KID  
What's that mean, "wrong impression"?

DAD  
I don't want you to think you're going to win like this, all the time.

KID  
I won twenty dollars!

DAD  
No.

KID  
Look.

Dad looks.

DAD  
OK, you know what, maybe you should stop.

KID  
You wait here. I know what to do.

Kid runs to cash in her ticket.

CASHIER (O.S.)  
Stan? Just just give me the key. Or stay here. Please.

Kid comes back with twenty dollars.

KID  
Is there a twenty dollar ticket?

DAD  
Listen. Wait. Give that to me.  
(Kid gives up the twenty,  
immediately but uncertainly.)  
So, look. How did you get this twenty dollars?

KID  
By playing the lottery.

DAD  
Right, but, how did you start off?

KID  
By playing a one dollar ticket.

DAD  
And where'd you get that dollar?

KID  
From you.

DAD  
Ah ha!

KID  
So?

DAD  
So, really, I'm an investor.

KID  
What's an investor?

DAD  
I fronted you, I gave you the money. You should pay me back on my investment. Now I invested one hundred percent, the whole dollar, and you contributed nothing, zero dollars. So I should get one hundred percent of the return. So this twenty dollars is really mine. See?

Long silence.

KID  
I guess.

DAD  
Great.

Dad pockets the twenty. Kid takes out her own wallet and withdraws a dollar.

DAD  
What are you doing?

KID  
I'll use my allowance.



DAD

You've only got one dollar, are you sure-  
(Kid puts dollar in the  
machine.)

You know, I don't know that I like this. You're really  
getting drawn into this machine. And it's probably illegal.

KID

What's that mean, "illegal"?

DAD

You're not old enough to play this, you could get in trouble.

KID

Wouldn't you get in trouble? You're my dad.

DAD

Well. I. Guess.

KID

I won again!

DAD

Of course.

KID

What's my prize?

DAD

Probably another free ticket.

KID

It says "three hundred dollars a day for life".

DAD

What?

KID

What's that mean?

Beat.

DAD

I think I should keep this ticket.

KID

No. You contributed nothing. I keep one hundred percent of  
the return.

DAD

But.

KID

Does that mean I get three hundred dollars every day forever?

DAD  
I'm not sure what it means.

KID  
Lemme go find out.

But the kid has already gone to check.

DAD  
I'm really unsure if it's legal for you to cash that in.

CASHIER (O.S.)  
STAN!

DAD  
I don't think you can even get the money from the counter.  
Sir! You don't have to...right. OK.

Kid comes back.

KID  
They say they give me the first three hundred, and I have to  
call the number on the ticket to claim the rest.

DAD  
We'll call when we get home. Wait - what's that?

Kid has taken a cell phone from her  
pocket.

KID  
It's a cell phone.

DAD  
Where did you get that?

KID  
I bought it. At the counter. It's a disposable phone.

DAD  
You know you're not allowed to have a cell phone!

KID  
You said I couldn't have a cell phone until I was old enough  
to pay for it.

DAD  
Right. But. I assumed that you would be much older.  
(Kid makes a call.)  
At least tell them I bought the ticket.

KID  
Wouldn't that be lying?

DAD  
Well. Not exactly. Maybe.

KID  
Hello? I won the lottery.

DAD  
I don't think you're old enough to really win that money. I think I should claim it.

KID  
I won a Lucky Five ticket grand prize. Am I old enough to win?

DAD  
No, don't ask that!

KID  
I'm six.

DAD  
Don't tell them!

KID  
What state am I in? California.  
(to Dad, shocked)  
He said a bad word!

DAD  
What? What did he say?

KID  
He said-

CASHIER (O.S.)  
(over her)  
Stan pick up on two.

DAD  
Aah! Don't ever say that word!

KID  
He says there's a loophole in California.  
(to phone)  
What? OK. I'll take the five million up front.

DAD  
FIVE MILLION?

KID  
I'm a millionaire!

DAD

Wait! Do the math! You're so young, it's probably better to take the three hundred a day.

KID

I'll take the money now.

DAD

Please, listen to me.

KID

What? OK.

(to Dad)

He says he's an entrepreneur. He wants to sell me stock in his company.

DAD

No way. Wait.

KID

What's stock in his company?

DAD

You're six years old, you can't buy stock.

KID

Hang on, I'll program that into my phone.

(she punches some buttons)

He says call this number and I can buy lots of things.

DAD

I forbid it.

KID

Why?

DAD

Give me the phone.

KID

No! I bought it. I followed all the rules. Didn't I?

DAD

Yes, but-

KID

Hello? Ernesto sent me. The codeword is "Horsefeathers".

DAD

Stop. You don't know what you're doing. You're too young.

KID

Not in California.

DAD  
Not in California. In REALITY. You don't understand the consequences of your actions.

KID  
Sure I do. I have five million dollars.

DAD  
But you got it in a completely irresponsible way!

KID  
What difference does it make?

DAD  
Well! It matters! It makes a difference!

KID  
How?

DAD  
I. It's. You can't just.

KID  
(to the phone)  
Hello? Hi! Well whatcha got?

DAD  
Don't buy anything!

KID  
Ooh! I'll take it!

DAD  
You know what? You're grounded.

KID  
(to Dad)  
I own a Congressman!

DAD  
OK, that's not even possible.

KID  
He's on the Armed Forces Committee and knows nuclear launch codes!

DAD  
You're grounded for thirteen years!

KID  
(to phone)  
Sure, tell him to vote yes.

DAD

Hang up the phone!

KID

Then have him tell the North Koreans to stick it!

DAD

Don't say "stick it"!

KID

Then make the President do it! Can I buy a President?

DAD

You're not allowed to buy the President!

KID

(to Dad)

You just made that up.

DAD

No. My father raised me the exact same way.

KID

(to phone)

Buy the President! Make those North Koreans pay!

DAD

You're not allowed to antagonize foreign nations! Or corrupt the fabric of democracy! Or ever, ever, EVER gamble again! DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR YOUNG LADY?

Short silence. Then, a low whistle, which grows to a shriek, which grows to a roar. An incoming missile.

CASHIER (O.S.)

Uh Stan? He went home? Well, uh. Ladies and gentlemen, we've just heard on the radio that we have a slight. Uh. Nuclear attack warning. Just in case, the emergency exits are located-

BLACK, and BOOM.

Dim lights up on Dad and Kid.

KID

What happened?

DAD

What do you think happened?

KID

We died?

DAD  
 THAT'S RIGHT! Because you DIDN'T LISTEN TO DAD.

KID  
 Everything was going really well.

DAD  
 Five million dollars doesn't seem so great now that the Pacific Rim has been wiped out, does it? You see how doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons gets you nowhere?

Brilliant spot on Kid. Triumphant chord. She looks off, amazed.

KID  
 Oh wow! Candy!

She floats off into paradise. The light dies.

Dad raises a finger after her for one final reproach. Before he can speak:

BWARMMM. A harsh red spot on Dad.

DEMON (O.S.)  
 HA HA HA! WELCOME, FALLEN MORTAL!

DAD  
 Are you kidding me?

DEMON (O.S.)  
 UH. NO.

DAD  
 This is a mistake! What could I possibly have done to deserve this?

DEMON (O.S.)  
 UHHHHHHH. LET ME CHECK MY FILE.

A long silence.

DEMON (O.S.)  
 SAYS HERE. THAT YOU WERE A TERRIBLE FATHER.

Beat.

Black.