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The Rugrats of Harvard Boulevard

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The Rugrats of Harvard Blvd.

STORYTELLER: Marco Marmolejo

Some of the kids these days just drive me crazy. It makes you wonder where in the world their parents are! Just last week I had an incident with three little rugrats. I do have some experience working with kids. Unfortunately, Leona and I couldn't have our own; although, between her career as a teacher and my involvement with the youth group and soccer, we feel that we have too many children to count. Of course, some were easier to deal with than others but all were a gift from God.

I can remember when Emily, around 16 at the time wise beyond her years, had affirmed this. After bumming around one day she told me, "You don't understand, coach. You are meant to be the Meadowdale coach. You're a papa

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to some of the kids that don't have one." Like wow. If that isn't a sign that I am where I am supposed to be, I don't know what is.

Of course, God likes to challenge us too sometimes. Going back to those rugrats from last week. You see here's what happened.

The grass had just come in that I planted the week prior. I had to plant more from the last time those kids had come through. I saw them out early in the afternoon. Riding their bikes all through the neighborhood, treating yards as one of those skate parks. Over the years I have been losing my patience with these kind of things. Leona on the other hand still had hers. She could tell I was getting antsy and wanted to check the situation out for myself.

"Oh they are just trying to enjoy the nice weather let them be," she said.

I assured her I wasn't going to cause any trouble. But those daisies weren't going to plant themselves. We had less than a month before the home show. I just wanted to see what those kids were up to.

She persisted. So, I just told her I was going to grab the mail, wouldn't be more than a minute, two tops. I am sure she didn't buy this for a second but before she could get another word out I slipped on my sandals and was out the door.

My eyes were planted on the three young boys. They seemed to be around Emily's age. I remember my initial thought was, "Man the little one could really use a belt ..."

I began to fumble with the mail box, I could feel Leona's stare from a mile away. Surely enough I turned to the window, Leona was waving that day's mail with her other wrist on her hip. I was caught in the act, surely wasn't the last. I blushed and gave her the look. She smirked and turned away. It works, what can I say. Just as I had charmed her over back in the day, it has been winning her over for years. I've still got it. Back to those boys though. I had given up on my mailbox decoy but before I could even turn around, "Swoosh." One of the bikes skidded to a stop sending old gravel stones into the yard.

I took a deep breath and spoke. "What are you kids up to?"

Two of them looked up at me and then quickly turned away as if they had just heard a gust of wind. My patience was beginning to run thin, "Excuse me, I was speaking to you." This time I got reactions from all three. It was also the first time I could get a pretty good look at them.

The shortest one had fair white skin. I was initially tempted to offer the belt off my own

pants but it was Maire's dad's, she probably would have gotten upset. Anyways, the other boy would be easily mistaken for any other tan white young man but he reminded me so much of Miguel, my older brother, when we were younger. I used to envy him for his fair skin as a Latino. When he spoke I even heard a hint of an accent. The last had very dark skin. If it was my guess, probably from a few houses down, being the west side and all.

I didn't get very much out of them at first. To be honest they almost reminded me of myself when I was that age, especially the one who had looked like my brother. I was telling them all about how I used to fool around and play the dozens. Of course, they gave me a funky look. Sometimes I forget it's not 1984. I felt that I was really starting to get to them though. After all I had been in their shoes. Unlike theirs, mine were tied ... but I have certainly been there.

Once I seemed to have their attention couldn't stop. I tend to do that, but it doesn't help that I just care so much about this area. I went on to tell them how beautiful the neighborhood used to be, being sure to make note of the abandoned houses with the broken windows, that who knows keeps causing ... I could see the ashamed expressions on their faces as if they

have done something similar in the past. I let it slide, I wasn't here to lecture them. I described the families that grew up here. The vibrant park across the street. The stores and places to hangout all up and down Salem and Main Street. I told them I wouldn't keep them here all night. So, I reached up for a handshake and without hesitation each young man smiled and shook my hand.

I'm always looking for these kids to have some type of "ah ha" moment. Within 20 minutes I may have gotten one. I am by no means attributing myself to fixing the youth these days.

THE POINT I'M TRYING TO MAKE IS THAT CONVERSATIONS REALLY DO MATTER. WE NEED MORE OF THEM. WE NEED TO SHOW THESE KIDS WHAT A NEIGHBORHOOD SHOULD LOOK LIKE. To respect one another as neighbors and support the children as if they were our own.

I went back inside and sat down in the living room. Leona looked up from her book and just shot me a smile. I couldn't help but smile myself as I looked past her through the window and saw all three boys riding away ... off the grass.