

Katherine's Story

Background

I wrote this story when one of my teachers, who had been promoted within the school, received an anonymous note saying she was only successful because she was 'best mates with the Headteacher'. She was devastated. We had to handle matters very carefully in school. She was advised to contact her professional association, who said it was a common occurrence – unsigned, nasty mail, they said, was on the increase – but that it was actually an offence in law. We never found out who sent the note but, at her insistence, we addressed it publicly within the team; she was heartened by the messages of support that she received from colleagues. Nevertheless, the note left her feeling extremely distressed; she would be sick before work and her confidence was dented.

General theme

How do people react to others successes? Some people are pleased for others; others are jealous – in their mind, the success that they see others enjoying, should be theirs.

What do Christians believe?

Christians believe that all good things come from God. As such, they should not be jealous of others' achievements. Jealousy is a sin. It means that we are focussed upon ourselves rather than God. We should try to be more like Jesus. Love is what matters: 'Love is patient, love is kind.' (1 Corinthians 13:4)

We are all asked to be 'modest' and not to lord it over others, as the Bible says the Scribes and Pharisees did.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us when we have feelings of jealousy in our hearts. May we remember to share in the joy of others, not envy it. Give us loving hearts always.

The story

Who do the children think sent the note; there is a suggestion. Can they be sure?

What would they have done?

Do they see Katherine as a victim, or is she a heroine?

PSMC links

- ✿ With modern social media, there are lots of ways of sending someone unkind messages: texts or emails, and of course some people like to rely upon what is called a poison pen letter.
- ✿ Is this a form of bullying?
- ✿ Why do some people like to put others down? What makes them act in this way?
- ✿ What would you say to a bully? How could you make them change their ways?

Katherine's Story

Katherine was really excited when her teacher announced that a Head Girl was going to be appointed in Year 6 at the end of the autumn term. She had worked hard these past few months and she knew her family were counting on her to do well at school, so she carefully planned out all that she would have to do to earn the job.

She spoke to her cousin, who was older than her, for some advice. 'Always work hard and find out as much as you can about what the job involves,' she was told.

Katherine decided to speak to her teacher, Mrs Kelly, to ask her what the job would be about. Speaking with Mrs Kelly was easy. Katherine really liked her and they had got on well from the first moment that they had met. Mrs Kelly outlined what the job would entail: 'You must be a good listener,' she said. 'You must work hard. You must have great ideas. And finally, you must always be kind to the other students.'

Katherine sighed. It was a tall order. She talked it over with Mum, who said, 'You're a great listener. Remember when Nanny was depressed, very sad, and you sat with her. You listened to her for the whole wet, dark afternoon in November and she felt better afterwards.'

This was true.

'You always work hard,' added Mum. 'Remember those weeks before your Year 5 summer tests, when you did a little bit extra every night. It wasn't always what you wanted to do, but you did it.'

'But,' sighed Katherine, 'you have to have great ideas.'

'Katherine,' said Mum, 'you have tremendous ideas. Who thought of us sponsoring a child abroad, when their family

didn't have enough money to send him to school? You! And, who suggested to all our neighbours that we have a street party for the Royal Jubilee. You!'

It was true, thought Katherine; she had done these things. 'But,' she said, 'you have to be kind to everyone. Do you think I am?'

'I do, but why not ask your friends to see what they think?' her mum suggested.

Katherine texted Lucy. 'Do you think I am kind?' she wrote.

'Sure you are,' beeped the reply on her phone, just seconds later. 'Remember who cheered me up when we lost our cat? You.'

She emailed Billy. 'Do you think I am kind?' she typed.

'You are the kindest person, I know,' pinged back the response. 'Remember the time when I couldn't do my homework? And I got into a right state? You helped me. And I got all the sums right!'

Katherine felt better. But what would Sally think? Sally was a girl in Katherine's class who Katherine thought didn't like her much. She never seemed to smile at Katherine, or appear friendly to her. Katherine thought she was kind to Sally. But what did Sally think?

After much thought, Katherine decided to go for the job of Head Girl. There were to be interviews and she had to write a letter of application, where she had to say why she would be the right person for the role.

The day of the interview came.

Katherine was nervous.

Mum was nervous.

Even Nanny, who now lived in Australia, was nervous.

Mr Smith, the Headteacher, was doing the interviews, alongside Mrs Kelly. Mrs Kelly smiled at Katherine as she walked into the

Headteacher's office. Katherine sat down and her interview began. It seemed like a lifetime, but after 15 minutes of answering hard questions like – 'What would you do if someone was in trouble because they had done something wrong?' – the interview was over. Katherine breathed a sigh of relief.

At the end of the day, there was a special assembly. First it was announced that David Kerrigrew had been appointed Head Boy. Everyone clapped, David beamed. Then Mr Smith announced, 'After some tough interviews, our Head Girl is ... Katherine Davies.'

In the days that followed, Katherine was happier than she had ever been. So was her mum, and Nanny in Australia was keen to tell all her friends of how proud she was of Katherine. On Friday, just as they were getting ready to go home, Katherine went to her tray to collect her things. There, on top of her reading book, was an envelope. A brown envelope. It was sealed. There was nothing on the front. Katherine took the envelope back to her desk and opened it. She stopped dead in her tracks. For what she read made her heart stop and her spirits plummet.

The letter inside simply said:

You are only
Head Girl
because you are
Mrs Kelly's best
friend!

It wasn't signed. Katherine burst into tears. She felt foolish afterwards. Everyone noticed. Mrs Kelly tried to be kind, but it was no use. Katherine was upset beyond words. Who had sent the letter? Was that what people really thought? Her friends? The worst thing was that she didn't know who had written the note. She looked up at Peter; it couldn't have been him. No, surely not. Then she saw Lucy. No, Lucy wouldn't do such a thing.

It was a long walk home.

Mum was kind as she always was.' Look,' she said, 'in life there are people who don't find it easy to enjoy other people's successes. When something good happens to someone else and not to them, they find it hard to cope. Often, they don't like themselves feeling this way but they can't seem to help it, even when they try.'

Mum continued, 'What did you say to Mr Smith and Mrs Kelly when they asked you what would you do if someone had done something wrong?'

Katherine thought hard, past her tears.

'I said I would tell them I was disappointed but that I would forgive them,' said Katherine.

'Exactly,' said Mum. 'So, as hard as it is, you must do that now.'

When she went to bed that night, Katherine found the Bible on her pillow opened at a page. Mum had put it there. This is what she read:

At once Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to Bethsaida, on the other side of the lake, while he sent the crowd away. After saying goodbye to the people, he went away to a hill to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, while Jesus was alone on land. He saw that his disciples were straining at the oars, because they were rowing against the wind; so some time between three and six o'clock in the morning he came to them, walking on the water. He

was going to pass them by, but they saw him walking on the water. 'It's a ghost!' they thought, and screamed. They were all terrified when they saw him.

Jesus spoke to them at once. 'Courage!' he said. 'It is I. Don't be afraid!'
(Mark 6:45–50)

Katherine felt better at once. With the Lord by her side she would have the courage to keep going and at the same time she would have the strength to forgive the person who had been so mean to her. With God's help, she would not be afraid!