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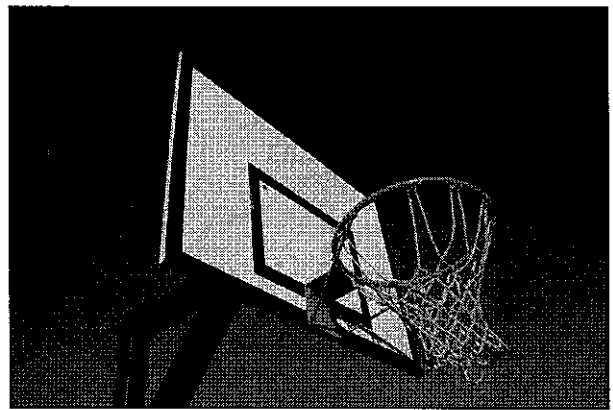
Class: _____

Sometimes a Dream Needs a Push

By Walter Dean Myers
2007

Walter Dean Myers (1937-2014) was an American writer of children's books and young adult literature. Myers wrote over one hundred books and received many awards, including five Coretta Scott King Awards. In this short story, a boy must find a new way to accomplish his dreams after his life changes. As you read, take notes on Chris' dad's attitude throughout the text.

- [1] You might have heard of my dad, Jim Blair. He's 6'5" and played a year of good basketball in the pros before tearing his knee up in his second year. The knee took forever to heal and was never quite the same again. Still, he played pro ball in Europe for five years before giving it up and becoming an executive with a high-tech company.



"Basketball" by Chilli Head is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

Dad loved basketball and hoped that one day I would play the game. He taught me a lot, and I was pretty good until the accident. It was raining and we were on the highway, approaching the turnoff toward our house in Hartsdale, when a truck skidded across the road and hit our rear bumper. Our little car spun off the road, squealing as Dad tried to bring it under control. But he couldn't avoid the light pole. I remember seeing the broken windows, hearing Mom yelling, amazingly bright lights flashing crazily in front of me. Then everything was suddenly dark. The next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital. There were surgeries and weeks in the hospital, but the important thing was that I wasn't going to be walking again.

I didn't like the idea, but Mom and I learned to live with it. Dad took it hard, real hard. He was never much of a talker, Mom said, but he talked even less since I was hurt.

"Sometimes I think he blames himself," Mom said. "Whenever he sees you in the wheelchair he wants to put it out of his mind."

- [5] I hadn't thought about that when Mr. Evans, an elder in our church, asked me if I wanted to join a wheelchair basketball team he was starting.

"We won't have the experience of the other teams in the league," he said. "But it'll be fun."

When I told Mom, she was all for it, but Dad just looked at me and mumbled something under his breath. He does that sometimes. Mom said that he's chewing up his words to see how they taste before he lets them out.

Our van is equipped with safety harnesses for my chair, and we used it on the drive to see a game between Madison and Rosedale. It was awesome to see guys my age zipping around in their chairs playing ball. I liked the chairs, too. They were specially built with rear stabilizing wheels and side wheels that slanted in. Very cool. I couldn't wait to start practicing. At the game, Mom sat next to me, but Dad went and sat next to the concession stand. I saw him reading a newspaper and only looking up at the game once in a while.

"Jim, have you actually seen wheelchair games before?" Mom asked on the way home.

- [10] Dad made a little motion with his head and said something that sounded like "Grumpa-grumpa" and then mentioned that he had to get up early in the morning. Mom looked at me, and her mouth tightened just a little.

That was okay with me because I didn't want him to talk about the game if he didn't like it. After washing and getting into my pj's I wheeled into my room, transferred to the bed, and tried to make sense of the day. I didn't know what to make of Dad's reaction, but I knew I wanted to play.

The next day at school, tall Sarah told me there was a message for me on the bulletin board. Sarah is cool but the nosiest person in school.

"What did it say?" I asked.

"How would I know?" she answered. "I don't read people's messages."

- [15] "Probably nothing important," I said, spinning my chair to head down the hall.

"Just something about you guys going to play Madison in a practice game and they haven't lost all season," Sarah said. "From Nicky G."

"Oh."

The school has a special bus for wheelchairs and the driver always takes the long way to my house, which is a little irritating when you've got a ton of homework that needs to get done, and I had a ton and a half. When I got home, Mom had the entire living room filled with purple lace and flower things she was putting together for a wedding and was lettering nameplates for them. I threw her a quick "Hey" and headed for my room.

"Chris, your coach called," Mom said.

- [20] "Mr. Evans?"

"Yes, he said your father had left a message for him," Mom answered. She had a big piece of the purple stuff around her neck as she leaned against the doorjamb. "Anything up?"

"I don't know," I said with a shrug. My heart sank. I went into my room and started on my homework, trying not to think of why Dad would call Mr. Evans.

With all the wedding stuff in the living room and Mom looking so busy, I was hoping that we'd have pizza again. No such luck. Somewhere in the afternoon she had found time to bake a chicken. Dad didn't get home until nearly 7:30, so we ate late.

While we ate Mom was talking about how some woman was trying to convince all her bridesmaids to put a pink streak in their hair for her wedding. She asked us what we thought of that. Dad grunted under his breath and went back to his chicken. He didn't see the face that Mom made at him.

[25] "By the way" — Mom gave me a quick look — "Mr. Evans called. He said he had missed your call earlier."

"I spoke to him late this afternoon," Dad said.

"Are the computers down at school?" Mom asked.

"No, I was just telling him that I didn't think that the Madison team was all that good," Dad said. "I heard the kids saying they were great. They're okay, but they're not great. I'm going to talk to him again at practice tomorrow."

"Oh," Mom said. I could see the surprise in her face and felt it in my stomach.

[30] The next day zoomed by. It was like the bells to change classes were ringing every two minutes. I hadn't told any of the kids about my father coming to practice. I wasn't even sure he was going to show up. He had made promises before and then gotten called away to work. This time he had said he was coming to practice, which was at 2:30, in the middle of his day.

He was there. He sat in the stands and watched us go through our drills and a minigame. I was so nervous, I couldn't do anything right. I couldn't catch the ball at all, and the one shot I took was an air ball from just behind the foul line. We finished our regular practice, and Mr. Evans motioned for my father to come down to the court.

"Your dad's a giant!" Kwame whispered as Dad came onto the court.

"That's how big Chris is going to be," Nicky G said.

I couldn't imagine ever being as tall as my father.

[35] "I was watching the teams play the other day." Dad had both hands jammed into his pockets. "And I saw that neither of them were running baseline¹ plays and almost all the shots were

aimed for the rims. Shots off the backboards are going to go in a lot more than rim shots if you're shooting from the floor."

Dad picked up a basketball and threw it casually against the backboard. It rolled around the rim and fell through. He did it again. And again. He didn't miss once.

"I happen to know that you played pro ball," Mr. Evans said, "and you're good. But I think shooting from a wheelchair is a bit harder."

"You have another chair?" Dad asked.

Mr. Evans pointed to his regular chair sitting by the watercooler. Dad took four long steps over to it, sat down, and wheeled himself back onto the floor. He put his hands up and looked at me. I realized I was holding a ball and tossed it to him. He tried to turn his chair back toward the basket, and it spun all the way around. For a moment he looked absolutely lost, as if he didn't know what had happened to him. He seemed a little embarrassed as he glanced toward me.

[40] "That happens sometimes," I said. "No problem."

He nodded, exhaled slowly, then turned and shot a long, lazy arc that hit the backboard and fell through.

"The backboard takes the energy out of the ball," he said. "So if it does hit the rim, it won't be so quick to bounce off. Madison made about 20 percent of its shots the other day. That doesn't win basketball games, no matter how good they look making them."

There are six baskets in our gym, and we spread out and practiced shooting against the backboards. At first I wasn't good at it. I was hitting the underside of the rim.

"That's because you're still thinking about the rim," Dad said when he came over to me. "Start thinking about a spot on the backboard. When you find your spot, really own it, you'll be knocking down your shots on a regular basis."

[45] Nicky G got it first, and then Kwame, and then Bobby. I was too nervous to even hit the backboard half the time, but Dad didn't get mad or anything. He didn't even mumble. He just said it would come to me after a while.

Baseline plays were even harder. Dad wanted us to get guys wheeling for position under and slightly behind the basket.

"There are four feet of space behind the backboard," Dad said. "If you can use those four feet,

1. the line marking each end of the court

you have an advantage.”

We tried wheeling plays along the baseline but just kept getting in each other’s way.

“That’s the point,” Dad said. “When you learn to move without running into each other you’re going to have a big advantage over a team that’s trying to keep up with you.”

[50] Okay, so most of the guys are pretty good wheeling their chairs up and down the court. But our baseline plays looked more like a collision derby.² Dad shook his head and Mr. Evans laughed.

We practiced all week. Dad came again and said we were improving.

“I thought you were terrible at first,” he said, smiling. I didn’t believe he actually smiled. “Now you’re just pretty bad. But I think you can play with that Madison team.”

Madison had agreed to come to our school to play, and when they arrived they were wearing jackets with their school colors and CLIPPERS across the back.

We started the game and Madison got the tip-off.³ The guy I was holding blocked me off so their guard, once he got past Nicky G, had a clear path to the basket. The first score against us came with only 10 seconds off the clock.

[55] I looked up in the stands to see where Mom was. I found her and saw Dad sitting next to her. I waved and she waved back, and Dad just sat there with his arms folded.

Madison stopped us cold on the next play, and when Bobby and Lou bumped their chairs at the top of the key, there was a man open. A quick pass inside and Madison was up by four.

We settled down a little, but nothing worked that well. We made a lot of wild passes for turnovers,⁴ and once, when I was actually leading a fast break, I got called for traveling⁵ when the ball got ahead of me, and I touched the wheels twice before dribbling. The guys from Madison were having a good time, and we were feeling miserable. At halftime, we rolled into the locker room feeling dejected.⁶ When Dad showed up, I felt bad. He was used to winning, not losing.

“Our kids looked a little overmatched in the first half,” Mr. Evans said.

2. a competition in which cars are driven into each other until only one is left running
3. a jump ball in basketball, between one player from each side, that’s used to begin the game with the official tossing the ball in the air
4. when a player loses the ball to the other team
5. to go too far with the ball without dribbling it
6. **Dejected** (*adjective*) sad and depressed

"I think they played okay," Dad said. "just a little nervous. But look at the score. It's 22 to 14. With all their shooting, Madison is just eight points ahead. We can catch up."

[60] I looked at Dad to see if he was kidding. He wasn't. He wasn't kidding, and he had said "we." I liked that.

We came out in the second half all fired up. We ran a few plays along the baseline, but it still seemed more like bumper cars than basketball with all the congestion. Madison took 23 shots in the second half and made eight of them plus three foul shots for a total score of 41 points. We took 17 shots and made 11 of them, all layups⁷ off the backboard, and two foul shots for a total of 38 points. We had lost the game, but everyone felt great about how we had played. We lined up our chairs, gave Madison high fives before they left, and waited until we got to the locker room to give ourselves high fives.

Afterward, the team voted, and the Hartsdale Posse all agreed that we wanted to play in the league. Dad had shown us that we could play, and even though we had lost we knew we would be ready for the next season.

Dad only comes to practice once in a while, but he comes to the games when they're on the weekend. At practice he shows us fundamentals,⁸ stuff like how to line your wrist up for a shot, and how the ball should touch your hand when you're ready to shoot. That made me feel good even if he would never talk about the games when he wasn't in the gym. I didn't want to push it too much because I liked him coming to practice. I didn't want to push him, but Mom didn't mind at all.

"Jim, if you were in a wheelchair," she asked, "do you think you could play as well as Chris?"

[65] Dad was on his laptop and looked over the screen at Mom, then looked over at me. Then he looked back down at the screen and grumbled something. I figured he was saying that there was no way he could play as well as me in a chair, but I didn't ask him to repeat it.

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7. a one-handed shot made from near the basket
 8. a basic principle that serves as the groundwork of a system

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The Crow and the Pitcher

By Aesop
620-560 BCE

Aesop was a storyteller who lived in ancient Greece between 620 and 560 BCE. This story is part of his collection of tales known as "Aesop's Fables," which did not survive in writing but were passed down by people retelling them. They have deeply influenced children's literature and modern storytelling culture. As you read, take notes on the conflict the crow faces and how he solves his problem. Think about the lesson the author is trying to teach the reader.

[1] In a spell of dry weather, when the Birds could find very little to drink, a thirsty Crow found a pitcher¹ with a little water in it. But the pitcher was high and had a narrow neck,² and no matter how he tried, the Crow could not reach the water. The poor thing felt as if he must die of thirst.

Then an idea came to him. Picking up some small pebbles, he dropped them into the pitcher one by one. With each pebble the water rose a little higher until at last it was near enough so he could drink.



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"The Crow and the Pitcher" by Aesop is in the public domain.

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1. a container used to hold and pour liquids
2. The "neck" refers to a thin part of an object.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What does the word "spell" mean as it is used in paragraph 1?
 - A. a saying with magical powers
 - B. a type of weather
 - C. a period of time
 - D. a land needing water

2. PART B: Which phrase from paragraph 1 provides the best support for your answer to Part A?
 - A. "a thirsty crow"
 - B. "when the birds could find very little"
 - C. "a little water in it"
 - D. "found a pitcher"

3. What does the information in paragraph 2 reveal about the crow?
 - A. He is not able to solve a problem.
 - B. He is resourceful and clever.
 - C. He is extremely strong.
 - D. He knows when to ask for help.

4. How does paragraph 2 contribute to the story's resolution?
 - A. After not being able to find anything to drink, the crow decides to ask for help.
 - B. After having lots of water, the crow now can't find any.
 - C. After struggling to get the water from the pitcher, the crow finds a solution.
 - D. After not being able to get water from the pitcher, the crow decides to look in a new place.

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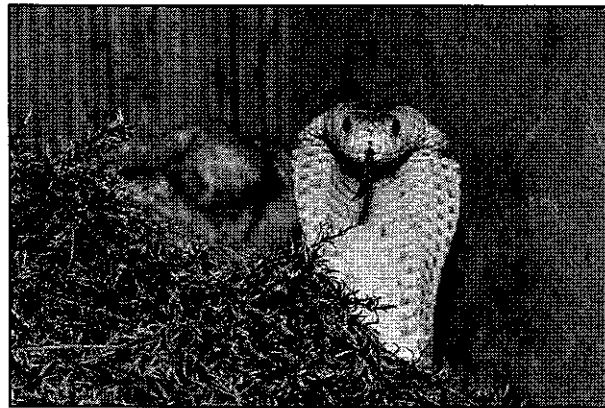
The Cobra Effect

By Jesse Sullivan
2021

*Jesse Sullivan is the author of the children's book **Spectacular Stories for Curious Kids: A Fascinating Collection of True Stories to Inspire & Amaze Young Readers**. In this excerpt from the book, Sullivan describes how a funny event led to what we now call "the cobra effect."*

As you read, take notes on why the cobra effect happens.

- [1] Have you ever been in a situation¹ where you are working hard to solve a problem, but actually ended up making the problem worse? That's the cobra effect!



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While this might sound like some cool karate move (I can totally see a kick called the cobra effect), it's not. The cobra effect is a term² used by people studying human and business relationships.³ The cobra effect starts as an incentive, or something that motivates⁴ you to do something or act in a certain way. But a cobra effect incentive has a result which is neither planned nor expected, and is usually something terrible.

Why is it called the cobra effect when it seems that this idea has nothing to do with cobras? We have Hors Siebert, a German economist, to thank for coming up with the name. He based it on a funny (well, it wasn't funny at the time) event which happened in India while it was still a British colony.

There were loads of venomous cobras in Delhi (the capital city), and that was obviously a BIG problem. Many died from snake bites, and people were generally afraid, especially because it was easy for snakes to get inside houses. The British government thought long and hard about possible solutions and they eventually⁵ came up with one. They'd just pay people for every

1. **Situation (noun)** a difficult place or experience
2. **Term (noun)** a word or phrase for something
3. **Relationship (noun)** the fact of being connected
4. to encourage

dead cobra they bring in, hoping to get people to do the killing themselves, thus lowering the snake numbers. Sounds like a good plan, right?

- [5] In the beginning, sure. People kept bringing dead cobras and getting good money for them. The numbers were actually starting to go down. But then, it seems that the British government neglected to take into account the element of human cleverness. You see, it wasn't enough to just kill wild snakes. Some people actually started breeding⁶ cobras, which they would then kill and get money for. It didn't cost much to breed the snakes so you could still make good money by just raising them yourself and then killing them.

The government found out eventually, and they stopped the whole deal. No more money for dead snakes. Forget about it. What did the cobra breeders do with the snakes? This is where the whole plan went bust,⁷ because the breeders took all the snakes and just released⁸ them into the wild. Now the cobra population was even higher than before! So not only was the problem not solved, but it had been made even worse.

There are many other examples of this throughout history. You may even have some examples in your own life. So today, the cobra effect and its impact⁹ on problems and solutions is still studied. It helps people to dig a little deeper into the unexpected¹⁰ consequences¹¹ of their decisions.¹²

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5. **Eventually** (*adverb*) at some time in the future
6. **Breed** (*verb*) to cause to create new plants or animals of the same kind
7. **Bust** (*verb*) to break down
8. **Release** (*verb*) to give off or let out
9. to have a direct effect
10. **Unexpected** (*adjective*) surprising
11. that which follows; result
12. **Decision** (*noun*) the act of making a choice