

Breaking

By ReadWorks

I'm a hard-nosed reporter. I ask all the tough questions. I intimidate crooks. I warm over the coldest sources. I get the impossible interviews. My stories are gripping, and to my editor's delight, I always file them on time.

My name is Oliver Acton, and I'm a fourth-grade journalist with the Mars Hill Elementary school paper.

It all started back in the second grade. Mom used to read the newspaper out loud at the breakfast table, all the stories that weren't too sad or scary, so I could learn something about the world before I went to school to learn other things. Sometimes I got so into listening that I forgot about my cereal. Some of the stories were big, about things happening in places really far away, like Egypt or Ohio. Other times the stories were about my hometown, depending on what section Mom read from.

I'd always ask who wrote the story when Mom finished reading one.

"A reporter," she'd say, and I'd ask again.

"I know but *who was it?*"

And she'd squint her eyes and make a joke like she couldn't read the name, and then she'd tell me it was George Limerick or Sharon Newry or Sidney Alexander or Blaine Whiting. And I wondered who those people were and how they got their jobs.

And I decided to write my own stories. At first I didn't really know what I was doing. I just made up lots of fake news. I wrote in crayon on white paper and drew lines for columns, and when I showed it to my mom, she laughed and said "how cute." When I got mad at her for saying my newspaper was "cute," she explained to me that news was true, and that I needed to write about real things.

That was back in the second grade. I've practiced a lot since then, and I know how to find stories instead of making them up. I can spell better, too. When I started out, I was just writing little things at home—about the bird that met its demise at the teeth of my cat, Jasper, or the tragedy of the flowers: when every single one of Mom's paper-white bulbs got washed out in a storm. (Mom stood in the mud when the rain stopped, crying.)

When I turned eight, I started writing articles during class, usually about something that happened at recess, like the amazing game-winning home run Karen Madison made during a kickball game, when she was always the last person picked to be on teams because she's tiny and really quiet. My teacher caught me doing it instead of classwork one afternoon and sent me to the principal's office, but I didn't get in trouble there.

"Oliver, you've got talent," Dr. Reed told me. "And better yet, you've found something you really like to do."

“Yes Ma’am, I do really like to tell stories, but I like telling real ones.”

“And that’s great, Oliver. I want you to do that. You just can’t do it in class when you’re supposed to be paying attention to the lessons at hand.” She cleared her throat, and reached for a stack of papers on her windowsill. “But I want you to keep writing. And I think you’d be perfect for this.”

That’s when I found out that my school had a newspaper.

“It’s mostly written for and put together by the fifth graders,” Dr. Reed said, “but I think you’d be a welcome new voice.”

And that was that. I left the office without so much as detention! I was eight years old and a brand-new reporter.

I started with small stories. A lot of the time, I just wrote what my editor, the fifth-grade English teacher, assigned me. That meant I interviewed a lot of kids about band concerts, soccer games, and art shows. It wasn’t until this year, in the fourth grade, that I got my big breaking story.

From the Mars Hill Elementary Gazette, week of October 21-25:

The playground is a noisy place. Everyone is doing something, and most of those things make sounds. Balls hit the ground with a hollow thud; kids yell and laugh; the swings squeak like mice; and whenever people kick gravel, it hits the slide with a PING PING PING! On Thursday, October 17th, a different sound hit the playground of Mars Hill Elementary.

A splash and a scream came from the duck pond just outside the baseball diamond. Darren Fitch, a fourth-grader, who was playing kickball, missed his pitch. “I turned to look and see who screamed.” His teammates yelled at him for getting a strike, but he knew something was wrong.

It was Kami Phillips, a second-grader. She had fallen into the water. There is fencing all around the pond, but a recent thunderstorm knocked a heavy branch into the fence which broke a section. “I didn’t see her fall in, but I heard her yell, and then I saw her splashing,” said Darren.

And then everyone went running. Soon, the pond was surrounded by students. They were all shouting and trying to figure out how to help Kami. “She was yelling for help, but I think we all knew better than to jump in, too,” said fifth-grader, Ann Berkowitz.

But Kami couldn’t swim, and she needed someone to get her, and fast. That’s when recess officer, Ms. Belfast, came running. The third-grade teacher has recess duty every Tuesday and Thursday, keeping an eye on all the kids to make sure no one gets hurt. She got to do her job to the extreme on Thursday.

“Ms. Belfast just ran up, dove in, and swam over to Kami,” said Ann. “It was awesome!” In a moment, both Kami and Ms. Belfast were sitting on the side of the pond, and sirens in the distance got louder. An ambulance showed up, and a rescue crew took it from there, wrapping Kami in a blanket.

“I really want to thank Ms. Belfast!” Kami said, in a thank-you note her mom brought to the school the next day. It seems Mars Hill has a hero.