

Question Mark
by Jason Ohler © 1991, 2015

Once there was a little boy named Mark who asked so many questions that everyone called him Question Mark. His friends thought him a little odd.

"Good morning, Question Mark" his friends would say. But instead of saying good morning back to them he would say things like: "Why is air invisible? Why don't things fall up instead of down? Do baby sitters really sit on babies?" And he drove his teachers nuts all the time asking them questions like, "If you swallow a watermelon seed will a watermelon grow in your stomach? If cows give away all their milk, what do they drink? Do bees say their ABCs or just there BBBs?"

Even Question Mark's parents were a little upset and finally decided to do something about it. So his mother told him: "It's time you stopped asking questions and just said things the way other people do. I'm afraid that when you grow up you won't have any friends because all you do was ask questions."

Then his dad told him that he had to practice how not to ask questions. He told him: "Once, for poppa, be like the other kids, okay? We'll ask you a question, and you just answer like a normal person, okay? Here goes. Hello, Question Mark. Sure is a nice day out, don't you think?"

"Where?" Question Mark asked.

"No, no," his father said, a little bit angry. "No questions. You just answer. Let's try it again. Are you ready?"

"For what?"

"To answer our question."

"What question?"

"The question I am about to ask."

"Well, if you haven't asked it, how can I answer it?" Question Mark's father would left the room, sad and confused and saying "heaven help me."

Question Mark's parents didn't know what to do. So they decided to take a vacation and think about it. They got lots of food, their sleeping bags and fishing poles and lanterns and wool socks and potato chips and put them in the car. Then they all drove down the highway looking for a place to camp. After they drove for awhile, Question Mark's dad pulled over and said: "That looks like a good place."

"Where?" Question Mark asked. His mother told him:

"Please don't ask any questions while we are on vacation."

But Question Mark couldn't help himself and while his parents set up the tent he asked, "Does that include while we are driving or just after we get where we are going? Do I have to wash my hands in the woods? What time is it in the North Pole? How come you can't tickle yourself?"

His mother told him: "Puleeze hush up."

By the time they set up the tent and ate some food it was getting dark. So he lay down in his sleeping bag and watched as the stars slowly filled the sky and thought to himself, "How far away are the stars? Is there life on other planets? How come dogs have four legs?"

Suddenly, he heard a sound- a big snorting, grunting sound and a sound like branches breaking. Mom and dad were asleep. Dad was snoring real loud so he didn't hear it. Mom had her earplugs in so she didn't have to listen to dad snoring, so she didn't hear the sound either. Question Mark lay still in his sleeping bag, afraid, wondering, "Is it a monster? Will he try to eat me and have really bad breath and really gross me out?" Then he heard the grunting and crashing sound again, this time much closer. Suddenly he saw a huge brown bear standing over him. The bear had a napkin around his neck and a knife and a fork in his hands. He smiled and his white teeth shined.

"Hello, little boy. My goodness you look tasty and I am a very, very hungry bear. I want you for my dinner.

"It's a little late for dinner, don't you think?" Question Mark asked, trying not to show how scared he was.

"Alright then. I want you for my late night snack."
"But why?"

"Why? Why what?" the bear growled. "Why do you want me?"

"Why? Because, I'm a hungry bear-"

"You sure you want someone puny like me who eats too many Twinkies when there are all of those soft, plump tourists waddling around out there full of all that good cruise ship food...."

"Well, I..."

"Who are so easy to spot 'cuz they walk around with those video cameras and wear those purple polyester pants and talk like they're not from around here?"

"Well, I..."

"That are big enough to feed the whole family, with leftovers for lunch?"

"Well, I - you know, you ask a lot of good questions and I don't think questioners are very tasty. (As he leaves, his voice trails off...) I think I'll go to that camp where all the Winnebagos are and find me one of them big ol' tourists from Europe- naah, maybe one from down south with all that good fried chicken in 'em, or maybe one from Vegas, where they don't exercise all get all stringy...."

As the bear crashed and rumbled through the woods, Question Mark's mother suddenly woke up and asked him: "What's that noise?"

"What noise?" Question Mark asked.

Question Mark's mother sighed and told him: "No more questions, remember?"

"Can I ask questions if it keeps me from being eaten by a bear?" he asked.

But mother had already put her ear plugs back in her ears and was fast asleep. And while Dad snored away, Question Mark lay in his sleeping bag and looked back up at the sky and asked himself all the questions he could think of.