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"Math Book Joke"

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Will Francis
Logan, Utah, the Francis Family Home
November 14, 2017

“Math Book Joke”

Joke

Informant:
My father, William Arthur Francis (51), was born in Roy, Utah in 1966 and has lived in Logan, Utah since before my older brother Michael William Dale Francis (26) was born in 1991. He is a freelance French Horn player for the Orchestra at Temple Square, the American Festival Orchestra, and various other performing orchestras in Utah and works during the day as a band teacher at South Cache Junior High and Willow Valley Middle School in the Cache County School District and has since he graduated from Utah State University with a Bachelor of Music Education nearly three decades ago. He holds a master’s degree in Music Education from Boston University. He has been happily married to my mother, Melody Marie Whitelock Francis (also a middle school level music educator) for 28 years.

Context:
This joke was told while I was sitting and talking with my mother, Melody (49), at her kitchen table in her home in Logan, Utah on a Tuesday evening. My younger sister Claire (13) was also in the kitchen, working on her homework. My dad Will was busy working on putting in new floors in the adjacent hallway and interrupted our conversation to playfully tell this joke.

The text is verbatim, transcribed from a digital recording.

Text:
Will: What did one math book say to the other?

Katie: What?

[Brief pause. He raises his eyebrows.]

Will: I’ve got problems. [He waits a moment and then smiles.]

Claire: [sarcastically] Ha ha ha. Melody: [quietly snorts]

Katie: Is that a middle school joke?

Will: No, just a dumb joke.

Katie: [laughs] Nice.

Texture:
My father tells this joke to my mother Melody, my little sister Claire, and I in the middle of our busy kitchen late at night, around 9:00 pm. Melody is finishing her dinner as we talk, and my
younger sister, Claire (13), is also in the room working on her homework. My Dad has been passing in and out of the room running errands around the house, and our two dogs and one cat are also in the kitchen. The atmosphere is bustling and animated. Then my dad finally pops around the corner of the hallway and interrupts us to tell us this joke.

My dad is a very cheerful, fun-loving guy, and tells this joke in an understated, but sly and playful way. It’s getting pretty late and I can tell he’s very tired from working all day, but he still is keen on sharing. I ask him if this is a “middle-schooler joke” because he has often told us jokes his middle school students say. He casts aside the question by saying, "It’s just a dumb joke."

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ENGL 2210: Introduction to Folklore
Dr. Lynn S. McNeill
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