

47. **Homemade**

Lexile: 1110



Matt answered the door with some ripe vegetables in his hand. Not one minute inside, and he was frustrated at the pots on the stove. He cracked jokes and gave us a tour of the house, proudly showing off a snapshot of him and some friends flipping their camera on a white-water rafting trip. He smiled while he recalled similar shenanigans from his 20s and joked about recent debacles on a family vacation. He's all boy—and a smart, goofy, little-bit-mischievous one at that—but he's also a dad, and to say he's involved doesn't begin to describe it.

"I just walked in, cold, and this woman personally escorted me to the roof." Matt was telling a story at the dinner table, about a gig for which he had to take pictures of some big views of the Puget Sound. "I shot for 30 minutes on the top of a giant corporation."

He's a photographer, and while sometimes the media enjoy elite access to places the rest of the world doesn't, a freelancer, working on a case-by-case basis for many different companies, doesn't enjoy that benefit often. Matt's confident, though, and in this case, he walked into the Starbucks corporate headquarters to ask for some time on their roof, and got it.

His projects have taken him all over. Besides the panorama he got to see atop Starbucks in Seattle, he's been on adventures that have even taken him aboard a helicopter. He was a staff photographer at a small paper in Seattle called the *Mercer Island Reporter*, and his photos graced the front page and insider pages alike, filling out the written stories with poignant images. Matt has a great eye. He's good at what he does, and you can tell by the photos that he likes it, too.

An artist of his talent, and certainly his experience, wouldn't have too much trouble finding a job. It's not easy no matter what, but with 15 years of work and obvious skill, it's a little less of a trial to find work as a photographer. Matt adds to the family piggy bank with an occasional freelance assignment, but since marrying his wife Carly and having their first child, Elsie, he's mostly a stay-at-home dad.

That explains the zeal and ease with which he peels potatoes, steams lima beans, and shaves cooked chicken while carrying on a conversation with the adults and playing footsie with his toddler. Only a man practiced in multi-tasking and skilled in both adult and child communication could deliver a tour of his home while playing with a stuffed pig. He's quick and makes quips you can't stop to think about, unless you don't mind missing the next one.

He takes us through Elsie's room. "We don't actually spend too much time hanging out in here," he says, flipping the curtains covering the closet space. "It's actually the only room I haven't totally baby-proofed yet, so we just play in the living room." His long-time friend Chris is halfway through asking what that means when Matt rattles off a list. "Oh, just covering outlets, putting away choke-ables, securing furniture so she can't pull it down on top of herself..."

When I asked to use the bathroom later, I fiddled with a lock on the toilet seat for two minutes!

Photographers pay attention to a lot of stuff. If a photojournalist is on assignment, he's in the action and must be able to participate just enough to get a feel for the scene, but not so much that he can't capture that scene on camera. Matt is telling stories and making wisecracks; he's also making up the table and filling dinner plates. Elsie's running laps around the kitchen to be near her dad. When she loses her balance, she just plunks down and settles in like she was sitting all along.

"Can you imagine if we just fell down without bending our knees like that?" He laughs. "Soup's on! I try to feed her only organic stuff, so I make all this stuff at home." Matt spoons some sweet potatoes into Elsie's mouth and then takes a bite of his own meal.

It's like that for all of dinner: he alternates feeding himself and his kid. He cooked both meals. He even gets to taste both; Elsie waves a hand at Matt's face and presses a finger full of ground beef into his lips. He looks away for a moment to finish an anecdote and inhale a few forkfuls of chicken, and Elsie shrieks.

“Man, kids follow you around with little stopwatches,” he says. “It’s like you’re on a timer.” And to Elsie: “What is it? What do you want? Do you want puffs?” He opens a container of puffed cereal and pinches them in his fingers, sprinkling the pieces onto Elsie’s highchair tray. “Any time you take to do something else, check email, go to the bathroom, they let you know you took too long. You’re never ahead of the game.”

Conversation isn’t dominated by any one topic, but Elsie is the subject of a lot of it. She’s almost a participant herself, except we don’t speak baby and she doesn’t quite speak adult. She can sign for things, like needing a new diaper, wanting more food, being quite finished with food, and thanking you. Matt flips a few more puffs onto Elsie’s tray. “When we first started feeding her these, I was actually doing this.” He places a single puffed cereal onto his plate and cuts it into fours with a butter knife. “Until one day I said, ‘*What am I doing?!*’” He demonstrates the obvious better technique again, and pieces of cereal bounce around. Elsie cracks up.

Out on the porch, she imitates the sound of planes with Matt: “KKkggssshhhhhrrrrwww,” and the father-daughter pair is wheels-up! Matt’s engaged with her as much as with the grown-up company.

After dinner, before we dig into cookies for dessert, he plays Ray LaMontagne for Chris, who’s never heard of the musician, and dances with his daughter in the living room. She’s leading the turns but can only turn left and flops over when Matt tries to spin the other way. We all get a chance to dance with the lady of the hour, and Matt glows.

Elsie’s getting tearful. Matt puts her bath basin into the sink and fills it with warm water, his baby on his hip. He walks his guests to the door when the tub is ready, and everyone thanks everyone else for the visit, promising more dinners and maybe a trip on Matt’s boat in the future. Standing in the doorway, waving to his company on the front step, Matt gets distracted, first by a beetle, and then a spider on the doorframe. He tries to brush it out of the way, but it drops, and suddenly making theatrical sound effects, he winds it up with his hands, smashing it with a smack, opening his palms, and slamming the door. Chris stands on the stoop surprised and laughing. Matt opens up the door again, wipes the spider back onto the doorframe and says goodnight as the door shuts on the evening.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Who is the main character of this story?

- A) an adventurous author
- B) a white-water rafter
- C) a famous chef
- D) a photographer who is a dad

2. How does the author describe Matt?

- A) as a shy, thoughtful artist
- B) as an arrogant, pushy friend
- C) as an outgoing, friendly person
- D) as a selfish-but-brilliant genius

3. Read the following sentence:

“That explains the zeal and ease with which he peels potatoes, steams lima beans, and shaves cooked chicken while carrying on a conversation with the adults and playing footsie with his toddler.”

Based on the evidence above, how can we conclude Matt feels about his life as a stay-at-home dad?

- A) happy
- B) frustrated
- C) anxious
- D) bored

4. Why does the author think Matt gets a lot of practice in multi-tasking?

- A) because he hosts a lot of large parties
- B) because he’s swamped at work at the newspaper
- C) because he gives a lot of interviews
- D) because he’s a photographer and a dad

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A) the process of becoming a pro photographer
- B) the growing trend of stay-at-home dads
- C) an evening in the home of an interesting person
- D) the author’s desire to become a better cook

6. Read the following sentence: “He looks away for a moment to finish an anecdote and inhale a few forkfuls of chicken and Elsie shrieks.”

As used in the passage, what does the word “inhale” mean?

- A) to breathe deeply
- B) to draw smoke into the lungs
- C) to eat rapidly
- D) to chew slowly

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentences below.

When Elsie was born, Matt became a stay-at-home-dad. _____, Matt spent several years as a full-time photographer.

- A) Consequently
- B) Previously
- C) Ultimately
- D) Particularly

8. The author has a positive opinion of Matt. What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

9. Describe how Matt cares for Elsie during the author’s visit.
