

Simon's tour of the town

On a weekend in early May, Simon's Aunt Sophie came to visit the family with Simon's cousin Ella who is four years old.

'Go and show your aunt around the town whilst I make dinner' said Simon's mother. 'You could show her where you go to school. ..and Sophie, ask him to show you down by the river too, it's really lovely this time of year.'

'OK, but can I have ice cream for dessert if I do?'

'Hmm', Simons mum considered the request. He stared at her hopefully as she made her decision. 'We'll see about that later' his mother replied. He knew that meant she'd say yes later.

Simon popped some bubble gum into his mouth for the journey as he held the back door open for Ella's pushchair.

As they walked down the main road into town, 10 minutes from the house, they passed the leisure centre. 'That's where I go swimming and I do karate on Thursdays announced Simon proudly.

'Well aren't you a healthy 10 year old, I hope Ella is that sporty when she's your age!'

Simon chew chew chewed as they continued towards the town centre in the direction of his school, North Park Primary.

As they walked alongside the low railings of the supermarket car park, Simon realised his gum no longer tasted of strawberry. With his first finger and thumb he pulled the sticky pink gloop from his lips and without any further thought flicked the gum in the direction of the path.

'Simon!' Sophie shrieked. 'There may not be a bin close by, but you could have asked me for a bit of tissue to put that gum in rather than throwing it on the floor!'

Simon felt his cheeks flush with heat. 'Sorry Auntie Sophie'.

'Or keep it in your mouth for just another 5 minutes until you do see a bin? Did you know it can take 5 minutes to remove one piece of gum from the street? The same time it would take you to walk to a bin. Just look at all the pieces you can see here on the ground. The black patches are what is left when the gum has been removed. All because people are too lazy to wait and find a bin.'

He thought more about it as they continued down the road, and started counting the number of pieces of trodden-in gum he could see. It would take a really long time to clear it all away and even then the gum shadows would still be there, making a mess of the pavement. His aunt's words rang in his ears: 'All because people are to lazy to wait and find a bin'

Simon stopped counting gum pieces when the number of crisp packets and sweet wrappers outnumbered them. He looked up to see they were approaching the school gates.

'Look at all this mess Ella, I hope when you start school your friends will look after it and keep it tidy more than Simon's school does.'

Simon remembered back to the lessons he had had a few months ago about litter and the reasons it shouldn't be dropped on the floor. He took this chance to show his aunt he really wasn't a litter bug.

'We had a visitor to school who taught us that litter can harm wildlife. Did you know that hedgehogs can get caught in crisp packets and die? I make sure I always put my litter in the bin now.'

'I'm glad to hear it!' Chuckled Sophie. 'I hope you will bin your gum when finished with it now? It's litter too. You need to be setting a good example for your cousin and any younger children who might pass through the school gates or the town'.

The river wasn't far from the school and they sat down briefly on a bench watching the ducks paddle past.

'Did you learn about the dangers of fishing line in your lessons?' Sophie picked up a bundle from beside the bench.

Simon shook his head.

'Ducks can get this caught around their necks and wings and if there are any hooks left on the lines, they may accidentally eat it. That's why you should make sure you always clear up after yourself when granddad takes you fishing. The ducks being here is part of what makes it a nice place to visit. I would think you would want it to stay that way'.

Simon did.

When he returned to school on Monday, he felt the school needed reminding of the harm litter does to wildlife. His class made new posters to display around the school and litter picked the grounds and outside the school gates.

Simon was pleased with how much better the school looked and wanted to show Sophie. He emailed his aunt with pictures of the path outside the school gates where they had stood at the weekend and told her how he had organised his class to spread the message once again to his school.

She emailed back:

'Well isn't that much better. I'd be proud to send Ella to a school that tidy! I explained to Ella about what you had done and I think you would be proud of her! (see picture attached)'

Simon clicked on the photo. It was of Ella reaching from her push chair putting a lolly pop stick in the bin!

He smiled. He liked the thought of having set a good example for his younger cousin.