

THANK YOU, SIR

A film short inspired by a true story

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1.10.23
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EXT. HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

A 4 year old shaggy Miniature Schnauzer named, CRICKET, pants as it runs full throttle, its tongue flaps up and down on the left side of its smiling mouth.

The dog's long leash is modified from an old water ski rope and attached to its body harness.

Cricket runs in a large circle in a big backyard, the leash handle held tightly by HENRY GILBERT (almost 6, tiny, serious). Without facial expression, Henry pivots in a tight circle as he flips the water ski handle end over end while turning with the energetic dog.

The colorful fall leaves crackle underneath Cricket's paws.

The home is a small ranch in the suburbs. An old, unused Weber BBQ has a broom and gardening tools leaning against it.

INT. HOME - KITCHEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Henry loudly chomps his Captain Crunch cereal at the table.

Cricket laps water in its bowl.

His older brothers, ETHAN GILBERT (7) and TOBY GILBERT (9), munch on cut up peaches and Life Cereal with lots of milk. They look around for a parent, don't see one, and immediately get into a friendly slap fight while sitting at the breakfast table.

Henry leaves the table and, right after he puts his dishes near the sink, slyly dumps his half-full water glass on top of Ethan's head and darts out of the room.

ETHAN

Hey!

Ethan gives chase, followed by Cricket. Toby gets back to eating.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Get over here tater tot!

BECCA / MOM (O.S.)

Boys! Bus is here in one minute!

(frustrated)

And please stop calling him that!

INT. HOME - BATHROOM - DAY - TWO MINUTES LATER

Henry brushes his teeth while his brothers dart back and forth in front of the bathroom door getting ready for school.

Henry then frowns at himself in the mirror, clears his throat and spits out toothpaste. He leaves without wiping off a little toothpaste left on the side of his mouth.

EXT. HOME - GARAGE - DAY - FIVE MINUTES LATER

A SUV slowly pulls out of the garage. Inside driving and chewing sesame sticks is BECCA GILBERT (33, wears scrubs, eye makeup, and an old Vanderbilt University baseball cap. She's a single mother trying to balance her medical job and raise three young boys on her own at the same time). On the seat is a badge which reads, Dr. Rebecca Gilbert - Radiologist.

The garage is full of sports equipment, including baseball bats, tennis rackets, and a pair of water skis.

Cricket jumps through a dog door to a side yard.

EXT. HOME - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

The school bus arrives. Becca waves to her boys galloping to the bus. Henry's wave lasts a little longer than both of his brothers' waves. He rubs his mouth with the back of his hand and accidentally wipes off the remnant of toothpaste.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY - SAME MORNING

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

22 FIRST GRADERS sit in small desks trying to pay attention to their TEACHER taking attendance. Some slouch, ONE CHILD picks her nose. Henry and THREE OTHERS do not fidget.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY - SAME MORNING

SEVERAL FIRST GRADERS play with Henry in a pile of colorful fallen leaves.

GIRL 1 FIRST GRADER

My mom says 'Race to Planet X' is
the best.

BOY 1 FIRST GRADER

My mom says 'Tiny Polka Dot' is.

Knowing Henry, neither child turns to him for his answer, but Henry has been listening to them. His face beckons them to include him in on the conversation.

Henry immediately pulls a little notepad out of his pocket to write something down just as...

OLIVIA (almost 6, wearing black and white saddle shoes), walks by. She gives a quick, waist high wave to Henry. He does the same, then she turns a corner and is gone.

Henry thinks for a second, forgetting what he was going to write in his notepad. He pockets it.

INT. HOME - FAMILY ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Henry watches TV, his mouth open in awe listening to a SINGER on America's Got Talent. Henry subtly tries to lip sync with the song he has never heard.

Becca watches him with interest from the other room.

INT. HOME - HENRY'S AND ETHAN'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

Becca gets off of Ethan's bed and bends over to fix his hair.

ETHAN
(almost asleep)
Love you mom.

BECCA
I love you more.

Becca goes to sit on the side of Henry's bed, leaning over him on her arm folded at his side.

BECCA (CONT'D)
I love you.

She puts her ear a 1/2 inch away from his mouth and listens for a few seconds. Henry's mouth moves, she hears something.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Love you more.

Becca leaves his bedroom, her face long from exhaustion.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Becca shuffles and yawns and then opens Toby's bedroom door.

INT. HOME - TOBY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Becca walks inside. Toby's in bed.

TOBY
Did you knock?

BECCA
Oh, Tob, I have to do that at
bedtime too?

Through the opening in Toby's door, Henry quietly creeps down the hallway and stops at Toby's door to listen.

TOBY
Lemme check with my sibs.

BECCA
Gosh you're tough. I love you.

TOBY
Love you mom.

As Becca turns to leave, Henry scampers back into his bedroom without her noticing.

EXT. HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Cricket runs full speed just like yesterday, its tongue flaps up and down on the left side of its smiling mouth.

With no facial expression, Henry again pivots in a tight circle as he flips the water ski handle end over end while turning with the happy dog.

The colorful fall leaves have been mostly raked, though Cricket still kicks up a leaf or two in its wake.

EXT. BECCA'S CAR - HIGHWAY - MORNING (SAME DAY)

Becca drives and, through her car's bluetooth, speaks with MRS. WALLINGER (30s), Henry's Speech Language Pathologist.

BECCA
(angry)
He's five, almost six!

MRS. WALLINGER (V.O.)
(pushing back)
Henry's language delay is still not
presenting other symptom disorders
except electing mutism, there are-

BECCA

-Yes, we've known that for awhile,
but if he's electing to not talk
and it's up to him, why wouldn't he
just want to yell and scream like
other kids? It's gotta be because
he didn't go to full term.

MRS. WALLINGER (V.O.)

No, no not at this point, no. He
does not present having weaker
language comprehension and his
understanding of vocabulary, muted
though it is, is that of his peers.

BECCA

(crying)
Then, why? When...?

MRS. WALLINGER (V.O.)

Henry will decide when.

Becca exits the highway and runs over a deep pothole in the
street with a loud THUD.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY - SAME TIME

A dirty, red kickball is punted with a loud THUMP. A DOZEN
FIRST GRADERS play kickball on one of the softball fields.

The LEFT FIELD PLAYER tosses the ball toward the PITCHER.

Henry plays right field. He looks up at the sky and watches a
jet's vapor trail through the wisps of high clouds.

His brother Ethan jogs by with TWO THIRD GRADE FRIENDS on
their way to the other softball field.

Henry sees Ethan and is about to wave when Ethan averts his
gaze, purposely not acknowledging his little brother.

BOY 1 THIRD GRADE BULLY

(looking at Henry)
Why's he so short?

BOY 2 THIRD GRADE BULLY

What's he, 3 years old?

The boys laugh. Ethan doesn't laugh but doesn't stand up for
his brother either.

Henry is stunned, but then distracted by a kickball bouncing
in his direction.

He races toward it, deftly picks it up and tosses it to the SECOND BASEMAN, who then whips the ball at the FEMALE BASE RUNNER's legs. She trips, doesn't fall, but is out.

Henry looks over at his brother Ethan on the other field to see if he saw his toss just now, but he didn't. Henry kicks the grass.

INT. HOME - DINING ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Everyone is eating dinner. Toby and Ethan are arguing.

No one notices that Henry writes on his little notepad, *Ethan, why are you not apologizing?*

ETHAN
What's it matter?

TOBY
Plenty, check out the original.

ETHAN
Too boring.

TOBY
Why 'cause it's TV from over 50 years ago?

ETHAN
Yup.

TOBY
You're so stupid.

BECCA
Hey, Toby!

TOBY
Sorry! But he is!

Becca gets up to take a cell phone call.

BECCA
Excuse me, eat your food fellas and get up stairs.

She leaves the kitchen.

Toby punches Ethan's arm and takes off in the opposite direction from his mom. Ethan stays seated and flails his other arm trying to grab his brother as he exits.

ETHAN
 (yelling into a mimed
 walkie-talkie)
 Kirk to Toby: forgot your dishes!

TOBY (O.S.)
 Kirk, no way! You'd be Harry Mudd!

ETHAN
 Who?

Ethan looks at Henry, who tears his note off the pad and, instead of giving it to Ethan, jams it into his pants pocket.

INT. HOME - HENRY'S AND ETHAN'S BEDROOM - EVENING (SAME DAY)

Ethan isn't able to fall asleep. He turns to Henry.

ETHAN
 I'm...sorry for today on the field.
 Henry's sound asleep.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY OUTSIDE OF BEDROOM DOOR - DAY

Early the next morning, the boys get ready for school.

TOBY
 Doesn't count.

ETHAN
 But I did do it.

TOBY
 He was sleeping!

ETHAN
 But I did say it!

TOBY
 Doesn't count he didn't hear you!
 Tell him now.

Henry's still in bed, though he stares with half open eyes at Ethan waiting for his apology.

ETHAN
 Mom!
 (sincerely to Henry)
 Sorry for yesterday. I felt so bad.
 (loudly to Becca)
 Can you tell Toby to stop!

Becca's downstairs in the kitchen eating some sesame sticks.

BECCA (O.S.)
Breakfast boys!

ETHAN
Smurf's still in bed!

BECCA (O.S.)
Henry?!?

TOBY
(matter-of-factly to
Ethan)
Did you know that Smurfs are super
smart and live twice as long as us?

Ethan is confused and doesn't know what to say.

Henry smiles.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - SOFTBALL FIELD - DAY

Henry's sitting on the bench with some OTHER TEAMMATES his age, his baseball cap a little crooked. He repetitively hits his glove with his right fist.

A TEAMMATE at bat gets a hit. The COACH (late 20's, the gym teacher) gestures to the BOY ON THIRD BASE to run home. The Other Teammates stand and cheer, Henry too but not out loud.

INT. HOME - FAMILY ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Henry again watches America's Got Talent, a YOUNG SINGER just received four 'Yes' votes from the judges. Henry is excited for the emotional singer and watches her leave the stage.

When an acrobat is next brought out onto the AGT stage, Henry quickly turns off the TV and takes off.

INT. HOME - BECCA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Becca is on Groupon ordering beginning singing lessons.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM - DAY

The auditorium is empty except Henry is standing on stage with Mrs. Wallinger, casually dressed.

MRS. WALLINGER

So a few weeks ago the two of us were in an empty classroom, last week we were in your school's empty cafeteria. Today we are in the auditorium. Why? To help you get comfortable in different spaces.

She hands him a piece of paper with an excerpt written in large print. It's from page 1 of Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, but that is not written on the paper.

While Mrs. Wallinger is talking (below V.O.), Henry looks down at the paper and reads all the words to himself: *'Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.'*

MRS. WALLINGER (V.O.)

(continuing)

It's called Behavioral Therapy, Henry. Now, I'm going to step away and, like we did the other times, pretend you are giving a speech. Yes, you might not yet be able to read all the words on the paper I gave you. It's a different paragraph than the others, not important, but pretend you do know the words and are giving a speech.

Henry writes something on the piece of paper.

MRS. WALLINGER

I'll be over here.

She slowly steps offstage. Henry slowly steps towards her.

MRS. WALLINGER (CONT'D)

It's okay, Henry, no pressure.
Where's that beautiful smile?

Henry stops, holds the paper at his side, boldly looks out.

MRS. WALLINGER (CONT'D)

Breathe...

He does so.

MRS. WALLINGER (CONT'D)

Feel that the space is okay.

Becca suddenly enters the auditorium. Henry is excited to see his mom and immediately goes to give her a hug.

MRS. WALLINGER (CONT'D)

A good place to stop.

Mrs. Wallinger walks up to Henry to shake his hand.

MRS. WALLINGER (CONT'D)

Well done, Henry.

As Mrs. Wallinger shakes his hand, she sees that he wrote 'The start of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone' on the piece of paper. Henry sees that she saw what he wrote and bites his lip. She smiles and joins Becca and Henry as they walk out of the school.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SIDEWALK - DAY - ONE MINUTE LATER

Henry runs ahead.

MRS. WALLINGER

Years of Henry living mute have ingrained mute behavior despite his lack of social anxiety symptoms or other developmental or speech problems.

BECCA

Did I..do that to him?

MRS. WALLINGER

No-no-no. Henry is just literally stuck in the nonverbal stage of communication.

Becca thinks about that as she watches Henry trying not to step on any cracks in the sidewalk.

BECCA

I'm going to give him singing lessons for his birthday next month.

Mrs. Wallinger thinks, then nods her head in approval.

INT. HOME - BECCA'S BEDROOM - LATE AT NIGHT

Becca sits at her home office desk wearing fashionable blue light glasses as she looks at the computer monitor. She's on a zoom call with Henry's pediatrician, DR. LAZKOWSKI (40's, her hair pulled back in a tight ponytail).

DR. LAZKOWSKI

Research shows 4-5 year olds should be able to use six to eight words per sentence, name four colors, count ten pennies correctly. So by 5-6 they should be able to pay attention more, know concepts like time: today, yesterday, and tomorrow. They try to sound out words and may be able to read.

BECCA

(frustrated)

Even you've never heard of an almost 6 year old not talking unless there are disorders.

DR. LAZKOWSKI

He does quietly whisper that he loves you.

Becca takes a breath and smiles acknowledging the beauty in that, but still concerned that her youngest is mute and, for all her medical training, she can't seem to help him speak.

INT. TAEKWONDO MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL - DAY - SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Henry enters a Taekwondo academy for his school classmate's birthday party. A banner reads, Happy 6th Birthday, Olivia!

The martial arts academy is large, clean and inviting. Some parents stay, others drop off and leave.

Henry runs over to Olivia, who's all smiles and wearing an orange martial arts belt wrapped around her waist. He hands her a wrapped gift and hesitantly walks onto the mat.

Loud music plays as children run around barefoot on the mat trying to keep two balloons afloat without letting them touch the ground. When one of the balloons hits the ground, everyone does 10 pushups.

The music stops.

OLIVIA

If an Instructor asks you to do something you must say "Yes, Sir" or "Yes, Ma'am". For example, if Miss Thomas says "Sit down", then you should say, "Yes, Ma'am".

Not knowing what to do next, Olivia looks over to the MASTER INSTRUCTOR (52, in good shape, well respected) who mouth gestures for her to say to them, 'Can you do that?'

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Can you do that?

MOST OF THE CHILDREN
Yes, Ma'am!

MISS THOMAS (17, petite, a 2nd Degree Black Belt) steps in.

MISS THOMAS
Everyone sit down!

And they all sit down.

SOME OF THE CHILDREN
Yes, Ma'am!

MR. BACKER (16, confident, a 1st Degree Black Belt) steps in.

MR. BACKER
Everyone stand up!

MOST OF THE CHILDREN
Yes, Sir!

OLIVIA
And everyone should say lots of
"Thank you, Sirs" and "Thank you,
Ma'ams." Can you do that?

Everyone says either "Thank you, Sirs" and "Thank you, Ma'ams." The children laugh. Olivia looks at Henry who watches her closely.

INT. TAEKWONDO MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The children at Olivia's party sit toward the end of the mat.

In the background, the Master speaks with a MALE PARENT.

MISS THOMAS
Okay, all eyes and ears on our
fabulous Demo Team!

SERIES OF SHOTS - OLIVIA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY - DAY

- Taekwondo demonstration, TEAM MEMBERS are aged 7-17, plus FOUR ADULTS.

With expertise, they leap high in the air, break boards, perform cool taekwondo movements, and use traditional weapons with skill. Everyone applauds.

- Henry's mouth is wide-open in awe!

- Henry and the others are split up into 6 rows with 3 in each row for relay games: skipping, one-legged hops, crab walk, bear crawl, and army crawl.

- The children are now in three lines taking turns punching or kicking paddle targets. Most scream, except Henry, as they hit and kick. Each Instructor plus the Master Instructor holds a paddle target in front of their lines. Everyone's having a good time.

- Olivia gives Henry another quick, waist high wave. He does the same, hesitates, then shuffles over to her line.

- The children drink water and use the restroom.

- Henry subtly moves his lips as everyone else sings 'Happy Birthday' to Olivia.

- The group sits in a circle as TWO OTHER MOMS help pass out cake, fruit, and napkins.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

RETURN TO SCENE

SEVERAL MOMS help clean up.

MISS THOMAS

(loudly)

Everyone make a circle around me holding hands, "Yes, Ma'am!"

MOST OF THE CHILDREN

Yes, Ma'am!

Olivia goes to hold Henry's hand.

MISS THOMAS

Okay, here is how to do a high-block. What's this part of your arm called? Everybody say, "Forearm"!

MOST OF THE CHILDREN

Forearm!

MISS THOMAS

Now make a roof over your head with your forearm like this.

The kids all try.

MISS THOMAS (CONT'D)

But don't rest your arm on your head, it should be above your head, on an angle. "Yes, Ma'am!"

MOST OF THE CHILDREN

Yes, Ma'am!

Then, to demonstrate the high-block game in front of the whole class, the Master holds out a squishy blocker for Olivia. She is excited and quickly glances at Henry before she takes the blocker from her Master Instructor.

OLIVIA

Thank you, Sir.

Henry observes Olivia. The Master then kneels down so it's easier for Olivia to reach his head with the foam end of the blocker. Olivia knows what to do, she's an orange belt. She winds up and brings the squishy blocker down on top of the Master's head five times in a row. The Master has fun exaggerating as if they are punishing blows.

MASTER INSTRUCTOR

Ah! E! Oh! Ow! Ah!

The children laugh at the Master.

Then the Master gets up. Each Instructor now holds their own squishy blocker and has fun trying to touch the top of the head of each child in the circle.

MR. BACKER

If we touch your head you have to sit down, you're out. Use your high-blocks to protect your head, "Yes, Sir!"

MOST OF THE CHILDREN

Yes, Sir!

MISS THOMAS

You have to stay where you are and not get bopped. Your goal is to stay standing!

The fun high-block game continues, all smiles until they're tapped on the head and have to sit down. It's quite comical.

MASTER INSTRUCTOR

Okay, everyone stand up and let's do that again.

ALL THE CHILDREN

Yes, Sir!

They all happily jump up and focus on the Instructors.

ANOTHER MOTHER hands Becca a free month pass to attend Taekwondo classes.

SERIES OF SHOTS - OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS

- At a softball game, Henry is handed a bat by his coach. Henry saunters up to the plate. TWO PLAYERS SITTING DOWN shake their heads, Henry sees it out of the corner of his eye. He's deflated by the time he gets to home plate.

- At school, all of the students are given a piece of paper. Henry notices that only a FEW CHILDREN politely respond.

- Moments at several of Henry's taekwondo classes. He's focused on trying to learn the martial art movements and kicking combinations. Lots of "Yes, Sir" and "Yes, Ma'am" and "Thank you, Sir" and "Thank you, Ma'am."

- The children do push ups, sit ups, squats, and high energy games with foam noodles, colored rings, and squishy blockers.

INT. TAEKWONDO MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY - DAY

The academy is packed, but the Master speaks only to Henry.

MASTER INSTRUCTOR

This is a safe place, you can be you, no one judges here, and if you don't want to power scream, then don't. Now get back in there.

He high fives Henry and watches him skip back into class.

BACK TO SERIES OF SHOTS

- Henry, arms wide open, speeds toward a kickball that's coming down toward him from a high kick. He doesn't quite get there in time, and throws his arms back in frustration.

- Henry at home kicks and punches in the air just like in taekwondo class. Becca sees him doing this from the other room, happy that Henry is practicing.

- Henry at the martial arts academy trying on a new taekwondo uniform. His smile conveys he knows he looks great.
- At the hospital, Becca puts into her phone's calendar that she has reserved Henry's 6th birthday party at taekwondo.
- Henry at home uses his little notepad to write the Korean numbers 1-10 in adorably misspelled English. He then shows his notepad to his beaming mom.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. TAEKWONDO MARTIAL ARTS ACADEMY - DAY - A WEEK LATER

BEGIN SERIES OF SHOTS

- The White and Yellow belt class practice hand/eye/focus coordination drills by pairing up and playing catch with a tennis ball, starting close to each other and taking a step back every time they catch the ball. Quite comical to watch.
- Miss Thomas hands out long plastic batons to all the White and Yellow belt students. Many of the Yellow belts say, "Thank you, Ma'am." Then they practice more hand/eye/focus coordination drills by flipping the baton end over end in their hands. Many batons fall out of their hands but are immediately picked up.
- Henry though seems like an expert, pivoting his feet to the left in a tight circle as he flips the baton end over end while he turns.
- Both the Master Instructor and Miss Thomas take notice of Henry's dexterity.
- The Master Instructor shows them how to reach for the baton behind their back and then do the same with the other arm, like a nunchuck movement.
- Henry's baton drops many times on the mat but he keeps picking it up and trying it again.
- SOME KIDS watch Henry and imitate what he is doing. Henry sees them trying to imitate him and stands a bit taller.

INT. TAEKWONDO MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL - ONE MONTH LATER - DAY

Henry's whole first grade class is invited to his 6th birthday party, the same group that was at Olivia's party last month.

BEGIN SERIES OF SHOTS - SAME DAY

- At Henry's birthday party, the kids play many fun relay games, including the 'empty cup game' where each person holds onto a paddle target while fast walking the relay while trying to balance an empty cup on top of the target.

MISS THOMAS (V.O.)

(loudly)

Everyone make a circle around me
holding hands!

- With joy, the kids scream "Yes, Ma'am" because they know from Olivia's birthday party last month that the fun high block game is next!

- Olivia again brings friendship to Henry by holding his hand in the circle.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

BACK TO SCENE

Then, in front of the whole class with parents watching too, the Master Instructor is about to hand a squishy blocker to Henry. Just like at Olivia's birthday party he now gets to try and tap the head of the kneeling Master Instructor. Henry quickly glances over to Olivia and back to the Master. He takes the blocker from the Master.

HENRY

Thank you, Sir.

The Master Instructor looks wide-eyed at Henry, who is surprised at himself for speaking.

EVERYONE stops. Olivia is about to loudly cheer for Henry:
QUICK FREEZE FRAME.

Henry's mom Becca is overjoyed with her hands covering her mouth, then takes a step to run to Henry: QUICK FREEZE FRAME.

Henry smiles the broadest smile ever: LONG FREEZE FRAME.

BEGIN MUSIC *Where do the Children Play* by Cat Stevens

SLOW FADE.

THE END