

Presentation to school groups, May 2014

This is the first time I've met your teacher, Mrs. Smith, but I already know a lot about her. In fact, I probably know some things about her that you don't. Would you like to hear them?

Mrs. Smith is the daughter of two circus performers. Her mom was on a high-wire platform in the circus tent – in the middle of the show – when she realized that it was time for Mrs. Smith to be born. Well, the best way to get down from the high wire is to jump in that big net underneath it, but that didn't seem safe. So the ringmaster asked if there was a doctor in the crowd who could deliver the baby. There were two doctors in the audience, but they were both afraid of heights. So.... the lion tamer had to deliver Mrs. Smith on the platform. And then he threw her off the platform into the net...

People who work in the circus... well, they're a little crazy to fly through the air, sticking their heads in the mouths of lions, riding on the top of an elephant. Mrs. Smith had five brothers and sisters, and they were named – now remember, her parents worked in a circus – they were named Juggle, Tramp (that's for trampoline), Igor, Trap (that's for trapeze), and Bozo. She had two sisters – right, two sisters – but none of those sound like girl names, do they?

Anyway, you probably call your teacher Mrs. Smith but her full name is Leann Smith. However, that's her new name. When she was born, her parents called her Highwire – well, you know, because she was born on the high wire – and of course, she took her parents last name, which was Hoppaloppadocious. So, her name was Highwire Hoppaloppadocious. Can you imagine having that long of a name? She tells me she liked it, but when she got to high school, she had to take those tests where you have to write your name in neat little boxes – you know – like this – and her name never fit. So she changed her name to Leann Smith.

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Mrs. Smith traveled with the circus until she was 10 years old. You learn a lot when you live with the circus that long. She can climb telephone poles, balance on wires, tame wild animals, catch an arrow with her bare hand, put up a tent... that's like 200 feet tall, and all sorts of other cool things. But eventually the circus ran out of peanuts for the elephants. You can't have a circus without elephants, and you can't have elephants without peanuts. The circus closed, and Mrs. Smith moved to Omaha when she was ten.

Mrs. Smith's mom was her teacher when they were with the circus. Can you imagine? Studying all day, plus you had at least two circus shows a night. When she moved to Omaha and all she had to do was go to school.... well, let's just say she was a little bored. So you know what she did? She became a spy.

Did you know she used to be a spy? Of course not. One of the first rules about being a spy is that you never tell anyone you're a spy. And if you're a spy, you always need another job, because people won't think you have enough time to be a spy. So first Mrs. Smith was a student and a spy, and then she became a teacher and a spy. She would travel all over world doing spy stuff – fighting like a ninja, taking pictures, hiding in the jungle. The president of the United States even gave her this medal.

But you know what? She's not a spy anymore. You see, when she was eleven, she liked being a spy more than anything in the world. But now she's 29, and she decided that she likes being a teacher more than anything in the world. But watch out – she's still got some pretty cool ninja moves.