

An accident and two coincidences

Andrew Shields

I slipped from the ladder of Miles's bunk bed and landed on my ankle, not my head. He'd had a nightmare just before midnight, and I had dozed for minutes at his side until I'd heard his breathing settle down. I'd wanted to get up without a sound, and for a second after hitting the floor, I thought I'd try out crawling to the door, but then I knew I couldn't, so I shouted quite loudly to my wife, although I doubted Miles would sleep through that. He did sit up to ask me in a daze, "Daddy, what's up?" Andrea came to help me to my bed then went back to check on Miles, who said nothing more. "He's gone right back to dreamland", Andrea said, "snoring to beat the band." Then she got me aspirin and ice. And while I lay there, I thought it would be nice to tell our pediatrician I was the one who'd fallen from the bunk bed, not my son. He would appreciate the irony; Miles had often heard his warning: "I see so many cases where my patients fell out of their bunk beds, even though I tell them to take care!"

You don't believe that I was thinking that while lying there that night? But surely you'll believe me when I say I did remember it when the X-ray showed in the morning that nothing was broken (torn ligaments).

I'd have liked to have spoken to Dr. Kaufmann sooner, but happily my son and daughter lived quite healthily for two months, until Luisa had to go in for a check-up with her Dad. And everything was fine, and then we spoke about some vaccination dates and joked about the funny things my daughter does. And since the afternoon was slow, I was able to tell the story of my slip. And when it ended, I added one more quip, a lovely bit of Basel irony: that very week, that very injury

had struck down Roger Federer – I wondered as I made the joke if I had blundered, but Dr. Kaufmann answered with a grin: "I was Roger Federer's pediatrician until he was fourteen and moved away to go to tennis school where he could play more seriously. He was very shy when I knew him." I told the doctor I had been a Roger fan for quite a while. The Basel boy who'd made it made us smile, and then we said goodbye. We had to hurry, Luisa and I, or our friends would worry, whom we were going to meet beside the Rhine. But we were hungry, and we just had time to stop at Starbucks to pick up a snack. While I was ordering, behind my back I heard a voice I'd heard somewhere before, and I thought in half a second (no more): "Someone's talking English on his cell, someone that I think I know quite well but cannot place. Which expat could it be?" I took my muffins, turned around to see Roger sitting there, his foot in a cast, crutches on the floor. He had the glassed-over eyes of someone on the phone. Coincidences – I'd have liked to wait to share this tale with him, but we were late, and he kept talking, so I left him alone.

(But maybe he will see these lines sometime and enjoy my anecdote in rhyme.)

Andrew Shields was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1964. Since 1995, he has lived in Basel and taught English-language courses at the University of Basel English Seminar. He has translated several books from German into English, most recently "Tousled Beauty", a selection of poems by Dieter M. Gräf (published 2005 as a bilingual edition by Green Integer). His own poetry was published earlier this year by Darling Publications in Cologne as "Cabinet d'Amateur", with German translations by Ulrike Draesner and photographs by Claudio Moser.