

Floorwalkers

Written by Jeff Stimpson

Wednesday, 24 August 2011 23:34 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 August 2011 00:03

Jeff Stimpson, writer and speaker to educators and professionals is a guest blogger today. Having grown up in an apartment building in NYC, I confess to spending part of my childhood joy riding the elevator.

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I take the suggestion of my wife Jill and decide to walk my 13-year-old son Alex around the upper floors of our apartment building when he gets home from school. This to combat his new bolting problem: leaving the apartment and darting into neighbors' apartments.

"Going to 15? Going to 14?" he says when we get on the elevator. "Not going to 15!" This is mimicking me telling him he's not going to visit floors. This comment of mine has, in recent weeks, propelled Alex and his autism and his impulses out our front door and up the stairs (slam! goes the stairwell door outside our apartment) to discover who among his upstairs neighbors keeps their doors unlocked in the late afternoon. He also likes to make the shapes of the numerals 1, 4 and 5 with his fingers.

This bolting thing is killing me. I hate that he barges in on neighbors; some of his favorite drop-in targets seem stern-faced and uncharmed. It's one thing to have a little kid plow through your door, but another to have that door almost unhinged by a 4-foot-10 young man who needs a shave and maybe medication.

Jill has suggested letting him run, me escorting, to "get it out of his system."

"Not going to 15..."

"As a matter of fact, Alex, we are going to 15."

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We start there. Alex darts off the elevator and makes a 1 and a 5 with his fingers, rocking on his legs with rapture. Then we get back in and drop to 14, where he does the same thing, except he makes a 4 and not a 5. Then he gets back in and hits "15" and we bob from 10 to 15 and back again, up and down. Do the neighbors mind this? I keep an eye on the floor number light inside the elevator, and the down arrow never lights, which means no one's requesting use of the elevator.

This beats the fights and the tussling and the scenes of dadly anger in front of neighbors riding the elevator.

"Fifteen!"

"You can't always dig in your heels with Alex," Jill has said. "He'll just dig his in harder."

We spend maybe half an hour, up and down, down and up, between 15 and 10. At no time does anyone seem to request the elevator or get on. "Alex, where next?" I set a timer on my cell phone for three more minutes, and show him ("Three!"). Once he does bolt from the elevator to try a neighbor's knob. "No no no doorknob! Leave the neighbors alone!" More and more he stays in the elevator car when the door opens and just uses his fingers to make the numerals. Maybe this is more about the numbers of the floors, more about just getting out a little bit after a day at school, than it is about barging in on neighbors and making his father want to evaporate.

By five o'clock, Alex is on the couch back in our apartment. I've secured the door with locks and alarms and a baby guard on the knob (a baby guard, for God's Sake!). He sits quietly and punches up videos on his tablet computer. Floorwalking seems out of his system for this afternoon.

*Jeff Stimpson is a native of Bangor, Maine, and lives in New York with his wife Jill and two sons. He is the author of "Alex: The Fathering of a Premie" and "Alex the Boy: Episodes From a Family's Life With Autism" (both available on Amazon). He maintains a blog about his family at [jeffslife.tripod.com/alextheboy](http://jeffslife.tripod.com/alextheboy), and is a frequent contributor to various sites and publications on special-needs parenting, such as Autism-Asperger's Digest, Autism Spectrum News, Fatherville.com, and The Autism Society news blog.*

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