

Chapter Eight

The We Can Do Anything Fish Kingdom

by Debra Bruch

Once upon a time down deep beneath the ocean lived a kingdom of fish. Oh, they weren't just any kind of fish. They were fish who could talk and laugh and work and play and argue. And so they called themselves the We Can Do Anything Fish and they lived in the We Can Do Anything Fish Kingdom.

They were a happy lot. They had lots to eat. The fish children went to school and learned lots and lots about the world around them. Their homes were warm and cozy and bright. It was good to live in the We Can Do Anything Fish Kingdom.

The King Fish was happy too. His enemies, the Sharks, went to seek the City of Atlantis and got lost. His mother-in-law went on vacation in the Bermuda Triangle and hasn't been seen since. Nobody threatened the Kingdom. The King Fish swam around in his palace with nothing to do and nobody to bother him.

Then it happened. The King Fish had a thought.

"I'll go outside my palace and see my kingdom," he said.

Was the King Fish surprised! All his fish subjects were working and playing and swimming around. And the noise! Such a noise he never did hear! Fish arguing all the time! He looked around and saw children fish at recess.

"It was in!" yelled a little fish.

"No it wasn't! It was out!" shouted another.

"In!"

"Out!"

"In!"

"Out!"

"What's going on?" asked the King Fish.

All the little children fish swam up to him. They looked around at each other until, finally, a brave little fish told him all about it. "We were playing," he said. "And Scotfish -- that's him - - threw the ball outside the line. So it's our ball now."

"But it didn't!" wailed the little one named Scotfish. "It landed on the line!"

"Humm," muttered the King Fish. "It looks like you should play the point over. Nobody scores this time."

The little fish children looked at the King Fish. Then they looked at each other. They agreed, and swam back to their game. The King Fish thought himself to be very wise. Very wise, indeed.

Just then a school of fish swam by. Much to his dismay, the King Fish heard them argue too.

"What's going on?" asked the King Fish.

A young fish wearing glasses answered him. "We are debating," he said, "about the color of the sea. We say it's green, and they say it's blue."

The King Fish was astounded. "Why are you arguing about that?"

The young fish wearing glasses answered the King Fish quite matter-of-factly, "Because we're on the debate team." And then the school of young fish swam away to continue their debate.

All day long the King Fish swam around his kingdom. And all day long he heard his fish subjects arguing about this and about that and about that and about this. Every fish seemed to have a point of view that seemed to be different than any other fish's point of view. And every fish seemed to think his or her point of view was the right one. "There's no peace here," thought the King Fish. "All I hear is conflict. All I see is conflict. This isn't right. There should be peace and quiet in my kingdom. I should do something about this."

And so he did. He passed a law.

"NO CONFLICT IN THE WE CAN DO ANYTHING FISH KINGDOM." No fish will argue or debate. No fish will fight during fish games. Anything having conflict will be banned. All fish will live without conflict. All fish will live in peace and tranquility. The King Fish thought himself to be wise. Very wise, indeed.

The first visitors to the palace were the fish teachers. "What do you mean by no conflict?" they inquired. "What about drama? Conflict is the very heart of drama. What about literature? Our great literature is full of conflict."

"Enough!" shouted the King Fish. "I will have peace and quiet in the kingdom! If no conflict means no drama and no literature, then so be it!"

"But our fish children learn so much from reading," said a fish teacher.

The King Fish didn't like to be crossed. He didn't like it at all. "That's the problem," replied the King Fish with a growl. "Our fish children learn conflict from books. Drama is to blame - -- "

"No, great king!" cut in the fish teacher. "Drama reflects life and conflict is a part of life!"

"No!" shouted the King Fish. "There should not be ANY conflict in the kingdom. Write drama without conflict."

"But then it won't be drama."

"So be it! Lock up the books! There shall be no conflict in the kingdom! All drama will be banned! All literature will be banned!" At that, the King Fish dismissed the visitors and they left feeling very sad.

The fish teachers spent the whole next day locking up the books. The plays of the great Shakesfish were locked away. Eugene O'Fish went. So did Arisfishenes, Christofish Marlowe, and all the other great fish playwrights. Very sadly, the teachers locked away the literature of Steinfish, F. Scott Fishgerald, and all the other great fish writers. It was a sad day for all, but no conflict was the law and everyfish had to follow the law.

The King Fish thought that his new law was terrific. "Now we can truly have peace in the Kingdom," he smiled to himself. The next day, the King Fish again swam around and about his Kingdom. But his fish subjects had changed. Everyone looked unhappy.

"What's the matter?" asked the King Fish.

For a long time, he got no response. No response at all. Finally, a child fish slowly swam up to him.

"Um, um, I was reading Fish Family Robinson and I wanna know how it came out. But I can't because they locked up the book!"

The King Fish patted the youngster on the head. "It's for the best," he said.

"Gee whiz!" another child fish wailed. "We were playing ball, and now we can't because we kinda had a fight."

"Fighting is bad! We should have peace in the Kingdom." And before anyone could say anything else, the King Fish swam back to his castle.

"Gee whiz," said a child fish. "We can't do anything!"

Others heard the child fish and knew that the child was right. And so they began to call themselves the We Can't Do Anything Fish who lived in the We Can't Do Anything Fish

Kingdom.

But passing the law didn't stop the arguments. As a matter of fact, things got worse. Soon, the King Fish had to form the Fish Police to enforce the law. And soon after that, the Fish Police hauled in fish who broke the law. Something had to be done. Something had to be done, indeed.

So the King Fish set himself up as judge and saw the fish who broke the law. A typical case was the case of the baker and his wife.

"What's the complaint?" asked the King Fish, feeling very proud of himself.

A Policefish replied, "The baker and his wife were caught in an argument."

"About what?"

"The amount of flour."

"The amount of flour?"

"Your highness! Your highness!" squeaked a voice from the back of the room.

"What's this?" asked the King Fish.

"A, um, character witness, sir," replied the Policefish.

"Well, what is it?" bellowed the King Fish.

The fish hesitantly swam to the bench. "I know this couple," she said. "You see, they always fight about how much flour to put in."

"So you always break the law?!" stormed the King Fish.

"Well, you see, they kinda enjoy it," she said. "And, and, they come up with a compromise. If he puts in what he wants, then there's too much flour. And if she puts in what she wants,

then there isn't enough flour."

The Policefish piped up, "Yes, sire. They haven't made a decent loaf of bread since before the law."

The fish continued, "You see, they end up putting in an amount between what he wants and what she wants. And that's just right."

The King Fish scowled. "So why don't you put in that amount in the first place without fighting?"

"We don't really know how much that is," replied the baker. "And, and, I'm worried about my wife, too, sire. If she doesn't have a good fight, she gets stomach pains. She hasn't been feeling very well, until this last fight. That made her feel better."

The King Fish was astounded! The King Fish was dumbfounded! He hemmed and he hawwed, until finally he blurted, "Get out! Get out! Go back to your bakery!"

And so they did.

Not long after, the King Fish found himself overwhelmed. He was seeing fish day and night. He wasn't getting any sleep at all. Finally, he broke down.

"ENOUGH!" he yelled. "I give up! I give up! I HEREBY TAKE BACK THE CONFLICT LAW!!!"

Now it was every other fish's turn to be dumbfounded. They could go back to their happy lives! The news spread like wildfire and everybody decided to have a great big party to celebrate.

"Yay!" shouted the children fish. "We can play ball again and wrestle and stuff!"

"Yay!" shouted the fish teachers. "We can unlock the books, and our children can learn about drama and literature. Our children can learn about life and how to live together without hurting each other!"

The King Fish heard what the fish teachers said. And he asked them, "But doesn't conflict hurt them?"

"Why, no," replied a fish teacher. "As long as they learn discipline along with it, then conflict helps them learn how to live a happy life."

The King Fish sighed. "Well, I sure have been confused these past few weeks. And now I'm more confused than ever!"

At that very moment, the King Fish's thoughts were interrupted by a very loud wailing. A group of children fish were arguing about their game, and the King Fish was VERY dismayed, very dismayed indeed. For a moment, he thought that things were going to be worse than ever!

But then something wonderful happened! The children fish decided to take the point over. And they laughed again and played happily.

The King Fish saw this, and he thought, "Oh! I see!" And the King Fish thought that maybe, just maybe, he did make a difference in his kingdom.

That night, everyfish had a party to celebrate their freedom in the We Can Do Anything Fish Kingdom. And they all lived in peace and happiness ever after, with just enough conflict to make it lively.

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