

X: A Fabulous Child's Story

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(edited and paraphrased by Linda Thurston)

Once upon a time, a baby named X was born. This baby was named X so that nobody could tell whether it was a boy or a girl.

Long before Baby X was born, all the smartest scientist in the world worked out the details of the Official Instruction Manual for Baby X's parents and, most important of all, to find the right set of parents to bring up Baby X. These parents had to be selected very carefully. But, finally, the scientists found the Joneses, who really wanted to raise an X more than any other kind of baby---no matter how much trouble it would be. Ms. and Mr. Jones had to promise they would take equal turns caring for X, and feeding it, and singing it lullabies.

The day the Joneses brought their baby home, lots of friends and relatives came over to see it. So the first thing they asked was what kind of a baby X was. When the Joneses smiled and said, "It's an X!" nobody knew what to say. They couldn't say, "Look at her cute little dimples!" And they couldn't say, "Look at his husky little biceps!" They didn't know how to play with the baby or what to say to it.

Ms. And Mr. Jones had to be Xtra careful about how they played with little X. They knew that if they kept bouncing it up in the air and saying how *strong* and *active* it was, they'd be treating it more like a boy than an X. But if all they did was cuddle it and kiss it and tell it how *sweet* and *dainty* it was, they'd be treating it more like a girl than an X. The Official Instruction Manual said "plenty of bouncing and plenty of cuddling, *both*. X ought to be strong and sweet and active.

On his first shopping trip, Mr. Jones told the store clerk, "I need some clothes and toys for my new baby." The clerk smiled and said, "Well, now, is it a boy or a girl?" "It's an X," Mr. Jones said, smiling back. But the clerk couldn't help. Everything in the store was in sections marked "Boys" or "Girls." There were "Boys' Pajamas" and "Girls' Underwear" and "Boys' Fire Engines" and "Girls' Tea Sets." Mr. Jones remembered that the Official Instruction Manual said "Buy plenty of everything!"

So they bought plenty of fluffy pink pajamas in the Girls' Department and Spiderman underwear in the Boys' Department. And they bought all kinds of toys. Tractors and trucks and a girl doll that talked in three languages and said, "I am the Pres-i-dent of Gen-er-al Mo-tors."

The *Manual* said, "Never make Baby X feel *embarrassed* or *ashamed* about what it wants to play with. And if X gets dirty climbing rocks, never

say Nice little Xes don't get dirty climbing rocks. Likewise", it said, "if X falls down and cries, never say 'Brave little Xes don't cry.' Because of course, nice little Xes *do* get dirty, and brave little Xes *do* cry."

Then it was time for X to start school. The Joneses were really worried about this, because school was even more full of rules for boys and girls, and there were no rules for Xes. The teacher would tell boys to form one line, and girls to form another line. There would be boys' games and girls' games, and boys' secrets and girls' secrets. The school library would have a list of recommended books for girls, and a different list of recommended books for boys. There would even be a bathroom marked BOYS and another one marked GIRLS. Pretty soon boys and girls would hardly talk to each other. What would happen to poor little X?

The scientists had to make sure that X's mother had taught X how to throw and catch a ball properly, and that X's father had seen sure to teach X what to serve at a doll's tea party.

Finally, X was ready. The Joneses helped X button on a nice new pair of red-and-white checked overalls, and sharpened six pencils for X's nice new pencilbox, and its nice new bookbag.

The Joneses had asked X's teacher if the class could line up alphabetically, instead of forming separate lines for boys and girls. And they had asked if X could use the principal's bathroom, because it wasn't marked anything except BATHROOM. X's teacher promised to take care of all those problems. But nobody could help X with the biggest problem of all—Other Children.

They couldn't tell what X was by its clothes or haircut. And it was very hard to tell by the games X liked to play. Either X played ball very well for a girl or played house very well for a boy.

Some of the children tried to find out by asking X tricky questions. Like it's favorite book, which was Lassie. When X said that its favorite toy was a doll, everyone decided that X must be a girl. But then X said that the doll was really a robot, and that X had computerized it, and that it was programmed to bake fudge brownies and then clean up the kitchen. After X told them that, the other children gave up guessing what X was. All they knew was they'd sure like to see X's doll.

There was a seven-letter-word spelling bee in class that day. And a seven-lap boys' relay race in the gym. And a seven-layer-cake baking contest in the girls' kitchen corner. X won the spelling bee. X also won the relay race. And X almost won the baking contest, except it forgot to light the oven.

The Other Children noticed something else, too. X seemed to have fun

being good at boys' skills *and* girls' skills. "Maybe X is having twice as much fun as we are!", they said.

From then on, some really funny things began to happen. Susie, who sat next to X in class, suddenly refused to wear pink dresses to school anymore. She insisted on wearing read-and-white checked overalls—just like X's. Overalls, she told her parents, were much better for climbing monkey bars.

Susie's parents were horrified by her behavior. But the worst came when the twins, Joe and Peggy, decided to share everything with each other. Peggy used Joe's hockey skates, and his microscope, and took half his newspaper route. Joe used Peggy's needlepoint kit, and her cookbooks, and took two of her three baby-sitting jobs.

Their parents weren't one bit pleased with Peggy's wonderful biology experiments, or with Joe's terrific needlepoint pillows. In fact, they were furious. It's all that little X's fault, they agreed. Just because X doesn't know what it is, or what it's supposed to be, it wants to get everybody *else* mixed up, too!

But the other children wanted to have twice the fun like X. So they were mixed up and happy and free, and refused to go back to the way they'd been before X.

Finally, the parents decided to call an emergency meeting of the school's Parents' Association, to discuss "The X Problem." They demanded immediate action. The Joneses, they said, should be *forced* to tell whether X was a boy or a girl. And then X should be *forced* to behave like whichever it was.

The principal was very upset. Disruptive influence? Mixed-up misfit? But X was an Xcellent student. All the teachers said it was a delight to have X in their class. X was a very good student. X had won first prize in the talent show, and second prize in the art show, and honorable mention in the science fair, and six athletic events on field day.

Nevertheless, insisted the Parents' Association, X was the Biggest Problem Child they had ever seen!

So the principal reluctantly notified X's parents that numerous complaints about X's behavior had come to the school's attention. And that an Xamination by the school psychologist was requested. Then the school would decide what to do about X.

All through the examination, you could hear the psychologist's low voice, asking hundreds of questions, and X's higher voice, answering hundreds of answers.

At last, the door opened.

Wiping his eyes and clearing his throat, the psychologist began: “In my opinion,” he said, “in my opinion, young X here is just about the least mixed-up child I’ve ever Xamined!”

The Parents’ Committee was angry and bewildered. Didn’t X have an *identity* problem? Wasn’t X mixed up at *all*? Wasn’t X *any* kind of misfit? How could it *not* be, when it didn’t even *know* to act like either a boy or a girl?

The psychologist whispered to X’s parents. “If I ever have an X of my own,” he whispered, “I sure hope you’ll lend me your instruction manual.”

Later that day, all X’s friends put on their red-and-white checked overalls and went over to see X. They found X in the back yard, playing with a very tiny baby that none of them had ever seen before. The baby was wearing very tiny red-and-white checked overalls.

“How do you like our new baby?” X asked the Other Children proudly.

“It’s got cute dimples,” said Jim.

“It’s got husky biceps, too,” said Susie.

“What kind of baby is it?” asked Joe and Peggy.

“Can’t you tell?” said X with a big, grin. “*It’s a Y!*”