

## 12 The pancake race

One afternoon Miss Roberts, Billy's teacher, made a special announcement. "Now children, I want you all to listen carefully. Tuesday next week is Pancake Day and I thought it would be fun if we had a pancake race. You can practice at home over the weekend, alright?"

The bell went. Billy got his coat and wandered out into the playground. He wasn't really very sure what a pancake race was. He looked across the playground and imagined lots of pancakes sprinting towards him, but that didn't seem very likely. So he imagined everyone throwing their pancakes like Frisbees to see whose travelled the furthest. Billy hoped that Mrs. Downer, the head teacher, would be the judge. He imagined how funny it would be when he got his pancake to land, splat, on the top of her head!

When he got home he told his Mum all about the pancake race and how his pancake was going to travel further than all the others. When Mum had stopped laughing, she explained to him what a pancake race really was.

"You run along and flip your pancake in a frying pan at the same time. It's very hard."

"I'll practice!" he said, with that look of steely determination that sends a shiver down Mum's back.

Mum whisked up some pancake mixture and fried the first pancake. When it was done, and cooled, Billy rushed out into the garden. He started running and then tossed the pancake. It flew high high up into the air. He kept running and held out the frying pan, waiting for the pancake to land in it again, but nothing happened. Nothing that is until there was a great shout from next door: "What the...!" and Mr. Brown appeared at the gap in the fence with pancake dripping from his head and all down his shirt. Mum made the peace as usual. Mr. Brown found his old tin helmet from the bottom of his shed, and Billy started again with a new pancake.

Billy ran and tossed and tossed and ran all weekend. Sometimes he ended up with a little bit of pancake in his pan. Sometimes he ended up with a lot of pancake in his pan. But more often than not he ended up with no pancake in his pan. But you know Billy, if he's determined to do something then he'll never, ever give up! By the end of Saturday afternoon the garden looked like it had been raining pancakes.

"You better clear all that up in the morning Billy!" said Mum as he went to bed.

"Oh yes Mum," he sighed as he wearily dragged himself up stairs.

But to Billy's amazement, when he went out in the garden the next day, all the pancakes had gone.

"Who could have cleared them up?" he asked himself. But then he heard Mr. Brown's dog, Lady, being very, very sick just by Mr. Brown's back door. Suddenly Billy knew exactly where all the pancakes had gone and where they were going!

On Sunday afternoon Gran and Grandpa popped round.

"What are you doing Billy?" asked Gran.

"Practicing for the school pancake race on Tuesday," he said.

"Oh, a pancake race!" exclaimed Gran excitedly. "I haven't done that for years. Can I have a go?"

"Its hard," said Billy doubtfully, "very hard!"

Billy put a new pancake in the pan and Gran was off. She ran round the garden tossing the pancake up and down. When she got back to Billy he expected to see just a few crumbs of pancake left in the pan, just like when he had a go. But when he looked he could hardly believe his eyes; to his amazement the whole pancake was still there!

"Oh!" he said, "Oh, err, that's, that's quite good!"

Billy kept practicing, but didn't get much better. Tuesday came and he was sure he would do very badly, very badly indeed. He went to school with his frying pan and his pancake, and a very heavy heart. Billy hated losing, and he was bound to lose this one.

"We'll have a boys race and a girl's race," said Miss Roberts. The boys lined up, Mrs. Downer was at the finishing line, and a photographer from the local paper was there as well. Billy concentrated hard; he kept his eyes firmly fixed on the finishing tape and on his pancake. He tried his hardest to pretend that none of the other boys were there. He didn't want anything to put him off! The whistle blew, and they were off.

Billy got in two tosses, and then, splat, his Pancake landed on the floor. He scraped up what he could and managed two more tosses before, splat, the pancake landed on his shirt. He scraped all he could back in the pan, but by now the pancake was so broken that every time he tossed it bits flew off everywhere. He was sure he was losing. In fact, he was about to give up when he heard a very familiar voice saying: "Come on Billy! You can do it, you can win!" It was Mum, who had stopped on her way to the shops to watch.

Billy looked around and suddenly realised that there were no other boys near him.

"Oh no! I must be last," he wailed to himself. But when he glanced back behind he could see all the other boys still trying to scrape their pancakes off of the floor near the start line. Quick as a flash Billy was off again. He got in two more tosses and then crossed the finishing line, and, because amazingly, or maybe miraculously, he still had half of his pancake left in the pan, he was declared the winner. Mum clapped and cheered and, much to Billy's embarrassment, gave him a big hug in front of all his friends!

"You were very good Billy," said Mum, as she tucked him into bed that night.

"I thought I was losing," he said.

"But you kept going, didn't you," said Mum, "and that's what counts."

Billy smiled, and his tummy rumbled. (His prize had been a double-sized pancake with a double helping of cherry filling, and a very large scoop of Ice cream.). Then Billy fell asleep, fast asleep.

The next day on the front page of the local paper there was a large colour picture of Billy. He was flying over the finishing line with his pancake high in the air. It looked very good; even Mrs. Downer said so. She had a copy framed and hung it in the corridor near her office, and whenever Billy is feeling a bit down and defeated he goes and looks at it!

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