

# James "Secrets and Surprises"

J.R. Lynn Johnston  
(a friend of James)



**A HandsOff Publication**



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**A**

**HandsOff Publication**

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**JR Lynn Johnston, B.A., C.R.T**

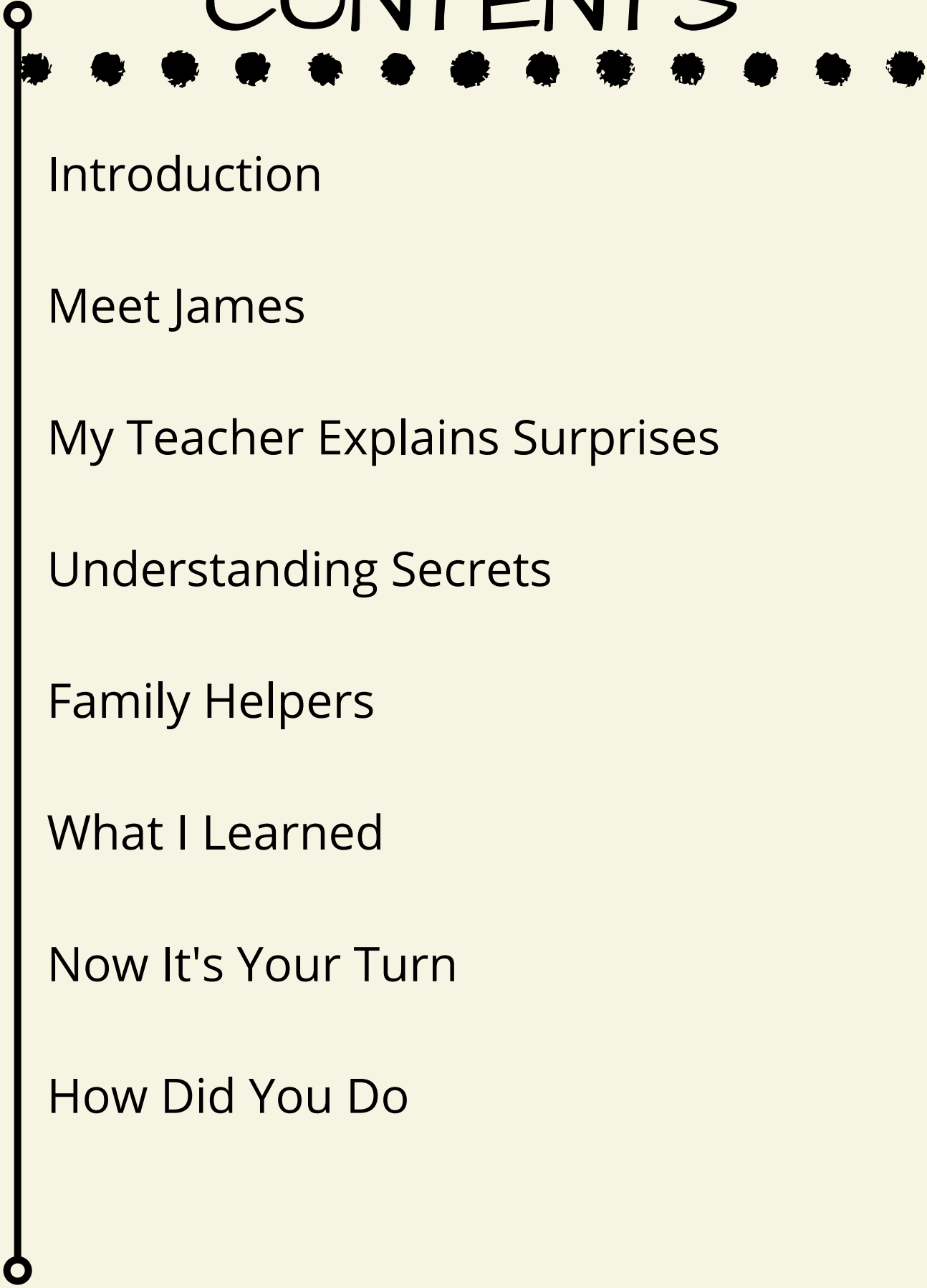


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***"Let's get this message to children across the globe. To be safe, there should be no secrets, only surprises!"***

# INTRODUCTION



## Helping Children Know the Difference Between Secrets and Surprises

To Adults Reading This to Children:

It is important to help children understand the differences between secrets and surprises. Secrets, especially when an adult tells a child "this is just our little secret, don't tell anyone," can be the result of inappropriate adult behavior.

Adults telling a child that this secret is not to be told to anyone contains potential for ongoing secrets of child sexual abuse, physical abuse, violence in the home, etc.

This short story about a young boy named James, illustrates one possible scenario hidden by a secret.

The purpose of this story is to help children know they should share any secrets they may have been asked not to tell anyone and makes them feel unsafe..

"surprises are fun!"





## Helping Children Know the Difference Between Secrets and Surprises

Encouraging children to tell if any adult attempts to sexually touch or involve them is important to empower the child to NOT allow secrets.

Surprises are an exciting event or thing that is to be happening, and will soon be revealed to others. The child fully understands that they will be sharing this with others very soon.

Encourage your child to ask questions and discuss how a surprise might be fun (i.e. getting a present for someone for their birthday), but secrets are never okay. Talk about examples to ensure your child understands. This is all part of helping your child feel safe and be safe.



"going for ice creme can be a great surprise, don't you think?"

# MEET JAMES



My name is James. I am 8 years old and I want to talk to you about some important things.

You see I was very sad, because I was keeping a secret. My parents told me not to tell anyone and I felt scared about what was happening in our home.

Then I learned some things about "secrets and surprises" and I knew what I could do to help my family and to help me.

I learned this from my teacher, Miss Moffat. Let me tell you what she helped me understand.

"girls can feel sad, and boys can feel sad too"



# MY TEACHER EXPLAINS SURPRISES



My teacher Miss Moffat, says it is O.K. to keep surprises, but we should not keep secrets - we should share this with an adult we trust when someone says, "this is just our little secret, do not tell anyone."

She explained that surprises are fun and good and very different than secrets. With a surprise, we will soon have others know what the surprise is going to be.

Surprises are like when we get a present for someone and we don't tell them until we give it to them.

Or maybe Mom says, we are going to surprise your sister with a new book. Or you find out Mom and Dad had a special day planned to surprise you and your sister and they take you to the park.



"we can have fun with surprises"



# UNDERSTANDING SECRETS



When I was a little younger, my Mom and Dad used to fight a lot. They hit each other and they hit me too. It hurt.

One day at school, my teacher saw my bruises. She took me to see the school nurse and we then went to the hospital. I didn't know, but I had a broken arm. It hurt, but my mom told me to keep this a "secret and not tell anyone," or she would be in trouble.

My teacher said this is something you need to tell others, so they can help you and your family.

"secrets are not okay for me"



Miss Moffat talked to me about secrets and why they could be harmful. She said that children needed to be open and honest about what was hurting them or making them sad.

When someone has hurt you, or is hurting others, it is important to tell someone that can help. She said secrets are not good, but surprises are okay. It was hard to understand the difference.

When others knew about my secret, I got help and so did my family. Mom and Dad met with some people that talked to them about the secret and then set up more talks. Mom and Dad made a plan to work on their anger. This made me happy.



"we can help each other by being  
honest"

# FAMILY HELPERS



There were different people that helped my family, we had a social worker, a doctor and a few other people.

I was happy that we had helpers come to our family. Over time this made a big difference and I could see that my Mom and Dad were doing better and so was I.

During the time our family was getting help, my grandmother lived with us. She was there to help too - helping me and my parents learn about how to be a strong and healthy family.

I also learned a lot during this time. I would not keep secrets when I was being hurt or others were being hurt.

"we must tell someone when we are being hurt or others are being hurt"



Our helpers explained to us how "secrets" were harmful. They said that for children to be safe it was important for them to find helpers and tell them when they were being hurt or others were being hurt.

One day my mother said she had a great surprise for me. We would be going together as a family on a little camping trip. It was our first camping trip! What a GREAT surprise.

We had so much fun and I loved this surprise. I love my family.



"surprises are different than secrets"

# WHAT I LEARNED



Whenever someone wants me to keep something a secret forever and asks me "no to tell anyone", that is a warning sign and I will tell a trusted adult about this.

Surprises never hurt and can be so much fun. Some examples of surprises I have had are:

- My Aunt and Uncle came to visit us and we were not expecting them.
- Grandma made a surprise dinner for all of us, making her special foods we all love.
- Dad got mom a new dress that she did not expect.
- And one that was so exciting too...mom and dad brought home a puppy for me.



# NOW IT IS YOUR TURN



## CHECK THE SECRETS

<p>Your friend tells you he really likes your new puppy and thinks he is getting one soon.</p>	<p>Your neighbor tells you not to say anything to your mom - that she sees her mom and dad hitting each other all the time.</p>
<p>Your teacher has suggested you meet him alone in the bathroom. You are scared. He says, don't tell anyone.</p>	<p>When you get home from school, your dad has something behind his back, he then shows you a gift for your mother that you both are going to give her.</p>
<p>A friend of your sister says she wants to play touching games, but it is only for you and her to know about.</p>	<p>You see a girl you know kicking another girl in the playground. She says if you tell, she will hit you and kick you next.</p>
<p>Your class is planning a big party for your teacher's birthday and no one is suppose to tell him about this.</p>	<p>Your grandparents tell you on a phone call that they are going to visit you next week. They suggest you not tell your parents.</p>

Remember, we tell **SECRETS**  
**SURPRISES** are OK

# HOW DID YOU DO?



## Why are these that are checked secrets?

<p>Your friend tells you he really likes your new puppy and thinks he is getting one soon.</p>	<p>Your neighbor tells you not to say anything to your mom - <del>she</del> she sees her mom and dad hitting each other all the time.</p>
<p>Your teacher has suggested you meet him alone in the <del>back</del> room. You are scared. He says, don't tell anyone.</p>	<p>When you get home from school, your dad has something behind his back, he then shows you a gift for your mother that you both are going to give her.</p>
<p>A friend of your sister says she wants to play touching games, but it is only for you and her <del>to</del> know about.</p>	<p>You see a girl you know kicking another girl in the playground. She says if you tell, she will hit you and kick you next.</p>
<p>Your class is planning a big party for your teacher's birthday and no one is suppose to tell him about this.</p>	<p>Your grandparents tell you on a phone call that they are going to visit you next week. They suggest you not tell your parents.</p>

Remember  
SECRETS HURT  
SURPRISES ARE FUN




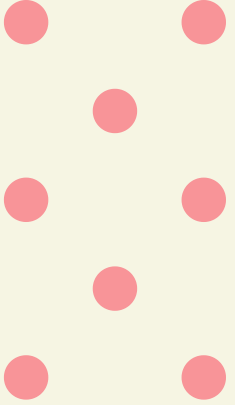
# NOW THE SURPRISE FOR YOU



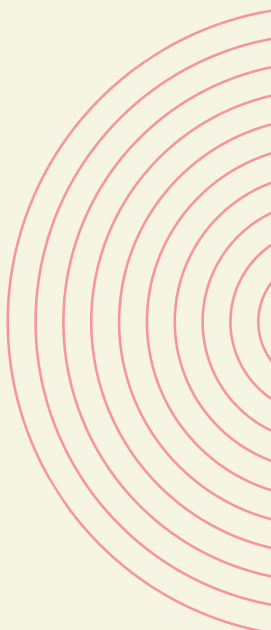
ADD YOUR NAME TO THE AWARD



"I don't keep secrets any more."



it does not  
matter if  
you're a girl  
or a boy, we  
can all be  
champions!



"We don't keep secrets any more."





everyone

can..

know the difference  
between secrets and  
surprises

I can,

you can,

we can.

Thank You!





## About the Author

Lynn Johnston is an international consultant and trainer in the areas of Leadership, Trauma Informed Care and areas of child protection.

As a former guidance counselor, mediator and President of a large teacher's union, Lynn retired to co-found LAMb International; a global capacity building organization. He has worked in over 30 countries equipping others to better serve orphaned and vulnerable children.

Lynn lives in Canada with his wife Ruby and two cats: Obie and Rags. Lynn and Ruby have 6 children, 11 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.

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