

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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# "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

Chapter 3:

## A LESSON IN NEGOTIATION



*"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy... Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."*

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

Five-year-old Dwight Eisenhower was an adventurous boy, interested in exploring his uncle's farm north of Topeka. There was only one problem—the gander in the barnyard considered it his territory and didn't like any intruders, no matter how innocent or small. Every time Dwight entered the yard, the goose "would push along toward me aggressively and with hideous hissing noises so threatening my security... I would race for the back door of the house, burst into the kitchen, and tell any available elder about this awful old gander."

Not one to give up easily, young Dwight would try again half an hour later, only to "flee ignominiously and weeping from the battlefield" again and again. Seeing no chance of Dwight winning the battle single-handedly, his Uncle Luther stepped in to assist—but not in the way you would expect. Rather than serving as Dwight's protector when he stepped outside, Uncle Luther "took a worn-out broom and cut off all the straw except for a short hard knob... With the weapon all set, he took me out into the yard. He showed me how I was to swing and then announced that I was on my own." Left alone with only the broom handle,

Dwight hesitated. When the gander neared and started hissing, Dwight trembled, but then "I let out a yell and rushed toward him, swinging the club as fast as I could. He turned and I gave him a satisfying smack right in the fanny. He let out a most satisfactory squawk and ran off." From then on, Dwight was the master of the yard—making sure that whenever he ventured outside he had the broomstick with him. The gander continued to hiss and move aggressively toward Dwight, but kept his distance when he caught sight of the weapon that had wounded his pride more than his body.

At five years old, Dwight probably didn't fully grasp the important lesson his uncle had just taught him. He didn't start any fights with the gander or anyone else, although he made sure he was prepared to defend himself if necessary. Years later, as Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe during World War II, he demonstrated that this early lesson in negotiation stuck: Operating from a position of strength was the only way to negotiate with an adversary.

On President Eisenhower's desk in the Oval Office of the White House, he had an engraved

plate that read, "Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re," which translated from the Latin means "Gently in manner, strongly in deed." Each day, this motto reminded him of the lesson he had learned as a boy on his uncle's farm in Kansas.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story is from Eisenhower's memoir, "At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends." Use a dictionary to look up any of the words that you are unfamiliar with.
2. Why do you think Uncle Luther didn't just go out and shoo the gander away?
3. What lesson did Dwight learn from his Uncle?
4. What does it mean to "operate from a position of strength?"

### ACTIVITIES

1. Sketch a storyboard or comic book of the incident when Dwight was five years old. Include the sound effects described in the story.
2. Write about an incident in your life where you learned how to defend yourself.