Learning the Hard Way

Some people learn the easy way. They heed advice and act on it. Seán is not one of those people. He learns the hard way.

'Take your coat, Seán,' called his mother.

'It's not going to rain!' shouted Seán, grabbing his school bag and banging the front door behind him.

Five minutes later the skies opened up. A coatless Seán arrived in school looking like a drowned rat. Another lesson learned the hard way. His younger brother, Matt, who wore his coat, arrived dry and smug.

'I might be younger, but I'm wiser,' Matt was fond of saying. Matt would never have dropped the dinner plates because he hadn't tied his shoelaces. Seán did, even though he had been warned.

When they climbed a mountain with Dad, Seán challenged Matt to a race back down.

'Last one down is a loser!' He started running.

'Not a good idea!' Dad called after him but, of course, Seán didn't heed. The slope was steep and uneven. Seán fell headlong, spraining his ankle and ripping his jeans. He hobbled down the mountain… reaching the bottom a long time after 'slow and steady' Matt.

'Loser!' jeered Matt, not in the least bit sympathetic.

The tables were turned when the brothers enrolled in after-school violin lessons with Ms Hardy.

'There's no easy way to learn the violin,' explained Ms Hardy, which didn't suit Matt, so he gave up after the second lesson. Seán, however, was used to learning the hard way and he persisted.

For the first few weeks, his playing sounded like a banshee wailing but day by day, Seán got better. He was good enough to play solo at the end-of-year school concert. Matt got the job of opening the curtains. Sometimes learning the hard way is the only way. ■

QUICK QUESTIONS

1. How does Seán learn?
2. Why was Matt smug?
3. What did Seán challenge Matt to?
4. Who was the violin teacher?
5. Why did Matt give up violin lessons?