



Verbose Verbená's **BACKFIRE ADVICE**

A Draw-it-Yourself Short Story

Proverbial Kids[©]

Wisdom for Young Families

By Karen Anderson Holcomb

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Verbena Louise Cruz was an ordinary young girl
with an extraordinarily big mouth!

If you were to meet her today, she might introduce
herself this way:

"Hi, my name is Verbena Cruz, and you probably do not know me yet, but, so like, I am in the fourth grade, but I could go into the fifth grade right now, because my Mama says I am smart enough and I'm old enough, but we moved when I was in the third grade because of stuff we did not like about my other school, so I'm older and smarter than everybody else here, but that is okay because I like to help kids do their work and I can be the Boss most of the time, except when I'm in Time Out for talking too much, but mostly I just get Silent Lunch for that."

Draw-it-Yourself:
Verbena Cruz

Bowling Ball, Hamburger,
Pink Flowers, Pork Chops

Verbena Cruz was **verbose**! She talked non-stop.
She could fit one hundred words into one
sentence! She could talk about five different things
at one time! And she had an *opinion* about
everything:

"It's my personal opinion this school needs a
bowling alley."

"The best restaurant in town is the **Burger Barn**."

"Flowers should be **pink**. That's my opinion."

"Pork chops taste like **dog food**. Period."

Verbena's Dad said she was just like her Mom.

She had “never met a stranger.” She was confident and carefree, observant and helpful, healthy and strong. Overall, Verbena was a very friendly girl. Unfortunately, she was also bossy and she talked too much!

You probably know people like that. They give a lot of *advice*.

For instance, Verbena was known to say:

“If you want people to hear you, **shout!**”

“If you want people to like you, **get a dog**. The bigger, the better.”

“You should wear **black**. It makes you look older and more mature.”

“Go to the **laundromat** if you want to meet people.”

“**Duct tape** fixes everything. I should know.”

“**Ketchup** tastes good on anything. I mean, *anything*. **Bacon bits**, too.”

“Always show up **late**. People will be glad you made it!”

Verbena was bossy, even when she was not really in charge:

“**Hey, you! Stand still and I’ll hand you the rag to wash the table.**”

“**Listen up! Everybody get in a straight line behind me.**”

Rainy Day, A Car

She made promises she couldn't always keep!

"I promise you it won't rain on Tuesday."

But, it did.

*"I promise I'll meet you at the Burger Barn
after church."*

But she couldn't drive.

Worst of all, because Verbena so enjoyed sharing information, she often spoke untruths about people. For example, one day she told her friends,

"I know Billy likes Sharon because they both put potato chips on their ham sandwiches."

Sometimes, Verbena's friends tired of her opinions, orders, advice, and empty promises. Sometimes they would even hide in her least favorite places to enjoy quiet time away from her!

One day, Verbena's friends Misty, Cora, and Becca were hiding under the slide during recess, when Harley Cruz ran over to remind them his sister's birthday was the very next day.

"How should we celebrate Verby's birthday?"

Misty asked.

"We can throw her a party!" Cora replied.

Ham Sandwich with chips on it

Misty, Cora, and Becca—hiding
under The slide, Harley Cruz

"Yes, a party!" Becca agreed. "And I know just where to have it!"

The three quickly made their plans. At lunch, they gave Verbena an invitation to her own party!

The next evening, the kids gathered at **Larry's Laundromat**. After all, it was Verbena's favorite place to meet people. Mr. Larry was happy to let them decorate the corner by the washing machines. It was a little noisy, but the girls just followed Verbena's advice: **shout** if you want to be heard!

"WHO BROUGHT THE GIFTS?" Misty shouted.

"I DID!" Harley pushed a large box across the floor to the corner.

"ME, TOO!" Becca placed her giftbag on top of Harley's box.

"WHERE'S THE CAKE?!" Misty hollered.

"CORA WAS BAKING IT AT HER HOUSE," Becca shouted.

Mr. Larry ran out from the back room. "Kids! Why all the screaming?"

Just then, Harley's big box burst from the weight of Becca's bag, and a **giant dog** leapt from the cardboard! Barking, he ran toward the door of the laundromat just as Mr. and Mrs. Cruz and the other parents were entering.

"Big Mack! What are you doing here, boy?"

Mrs. Cruz exclaimed to the family dog.

Harley answered, "I was loaning him to Verbe-

na for her birthday, Mom, so people would like her!”

What Verbena Saw

Verbena entered the laundromat with a confused look on her face.

She saw Harley wrestling Big Mack, Becca climbing out of a large cardboard box grasping a giftbag, Misty pacing the floor and wringing her hands near the fogged windows, and her parents looking around bewildered. The roar of the washers and dryers drowned out any conversation with the other parents. Nobody knew what to do.

Finally, five minutes **late**, Cora appeared with a birthday cake, sprinkled with brown flakes.

Red **ketchup** puddled on the icing and ran down the sides.

Verbena's Birthday Cake

Cora's face was red, too, and apologetic.

Verbena exclaimed, “What in the WORLD?!”

“It's ketchup, Verby. You said it's good on anything. **Bacon bits**, too!”

Bacon bits on a birthday cake? Verbena had never heard of such.

Suddenly, Big Mack lunged for the cake. His furry jaw dropped open. Then, *smack!* Mr. Cruz stepped in front of him, taking the cake from Cora.

As if that weren't enough, Harley whipped out a roll of **duct tape** and quickly wrapped it three times around the dog's hairy neck.

“I'm sorry, Verbena!” Cora cried. “I forgot

dogs like bacon!”

Harley and duct-Taped Big Mack

It was the strangest birthday party Verbena Cruz had ever attended, and it was her own! They sang the Birthday song, she blew out the candles, and they all had a slice of chocolate ketchup, bacon-sprinkled cake—all except Harley, who was whimpering over Big Mack’s sticky situation.

Then, Misty handed Verbena her colorful giftbag!

Misty’s Giftbag, The Black Dress

Excited, Verbena tossed away the yellow tissue paper on top and lifted out an old, heavy, floor-length black dress.

“Do you like it, Verby?” Becca asked, excitedly.

“It’s **black!** Like you said, to make you look older and more mature!”

“Thank you,” Verbena swallowed hard to hide her disappointment. She had expected something colorful to match the bag. But, after all, her friends were only following her advice.

“I have an idea,” Mrs. Cruz said graciously, wiping a dot of ketchup from her lip. “Why don’t we all go to the Burger Barn to finish our celebration?”

The Burger Barn Restaurant

The Burger Barn! In Verbena’s opinion it was the very best restaurant in town.

“What a great way to finish a wonderful birthday party,” Verbena said in her most sincere voice and smiled.

Everyone inside The Burger Barn,
Verbena's other gifts

They cleaned up their mess, thanked Mr. Larry for his hospitality, and exited the door of the laundromat. As Harley pulled Big Mack into the backseat of their car, he asked,

“Mom, could I order some bacon for Big Mack? I feel sorry for him.”

“Yes, honey.”

“I’ll save some fries, too, Bubba,” Verbena said. “And I’ll help you cut that duct tape off him when we get home. I promise.”

It was one promise she knew she could keep.

On the way to the restaurant, Verbena thought about her strange party and how she should encourage her friends to think for themselves!

The Burger Barn was, indeed, a good place to finish her party, and Verbena received other gifts as well. But that night at home, she did not forget her promise. She gave Big Mack a super good haircut!

Verbena with Harley, giving Big Mack a haircut to remove the tape

Later, her parents came to her room to wish her goodnight.

“Verby,” her Dad said, “your mother and I noticed that your friends tried to please you tonight by following your advice.”

She confessed it was true.

“I was bossy and my advice back-fired,” she

said.

“Friendship is a blessing, Verbena,”
her Mom said gently,

“We have the power with our tongues to be
humble or bossy, to encourage or discourage.
Let’s you and I resist talking so much. We can
express ourselves in other ways.”

They read a few special verses from the book
of Proverbs in the Bible about the mouth —
how good and bad come from it. Verbena
grew quiet. She decided she would speak less
and do more with her hands, like
dog grooming or artwork.

Verbena’s family reading The Bible

Verbena falling asleep

Her parents tucked her in and they prayed
together, asking God to guide their speech.

The last image on Verbena’s mind as she drift-
ed off to sleep was of red ketchup oozing
down chocolate icing.

*It might be a while before I eat any more
ketchup or bacon bits!*

She thought, a smile curling the edges of her
closed lips.

The End.

Proverbs for Parenting

(C: Control Your Tongue)

You have been trapped by what you said,
ensnared by the words of your mouth. **6:2**

Sin is not ended by multiplying words,
but the prudent hold their tongues. **10:19**

Whoever derides their neighbor has no sense,
but the one who has understanding holds their tongue. **11:12**

The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge,
but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. **15:2**

A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—
and how good is a timely word! **15:23**

Light in a messenger's eyes brings joy to the heart,
and good news gives health to the bones. **15:30**

Kings take pleasure in honest lips;
they value the one who speaks what is right. **16:13**

Gracious words are a honeycomb,
sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. **16:24**

Whoever would foster love covers over an offense,
but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends. **17:9**

Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent,
and discerning if they hold their tongues. **17:28**

Fools find no pleasure in understanding
but delight in airing their own opinions. **18:2**

The one who reveals secrets is a constant gossip;
avoid someone with a big mouth. **20:19**

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues
keep themselves from calamity. **21:23**