

Transcript of Andy (Robert) Abeyta Interview

Interviewer

Tell me your name.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Richard Abeyta. But everybody calls me Andy. Because my middle name is Andrew.

Interviewer

And where do you work?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

I work for Wells Fargo as a financial crime specialist.

Interviewer

As of now you're a single father. Tell me about Connor and Robbie.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Okay. So I've been -- I'm a single father. Two boys. Connor and Robbie. Connor is now just turned five. Robbie is three, going on four. They're fairly close in age and full of energy so my days aren't boring at all. I'm pretty busy all the time when I have them, so there's a lot of moving, shaking, getting stuff done in the morning, you know, finding something to do, keep them active. Trying to keep myself active so that I'm not tired when they're not, which is a lot, if I'm not careful, so. We do a lot of activities together. Play games. See movies, stuff like that. And take them to school.

Interviewer

And they love super hero characters?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Yeah, I've been a super hero fan since I was five years old. So for me, it's not just the fact that they're super heroes in general, but there's a lot of good moral stories to them. So they like that kind of stuff too and I get to read the stories to them and make little voices for them and stuff like that, so it's kind of fun. I like it.

Interviewer

It can be overwhelming.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Uh-hmm, there are days. If you're not completely attentive, if you're not really, really paying a lot of attention, and it can happen, it's amazing how easily it is for things to go off the rails. Like even for today, just by playing in the park for a few minutes before we had to get them into school, Robbie slid on the slide and it

was wet and so obviously his pants got all wet and I needed to get him all changed before I get him over to school and it changes. Within that timeframe you think you have enough time to get done with what you need to do and now you're off by five minutes and it's amazing how that five minutes is suddenly very crucial.

Interviewer

Why do they line them up like that?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

I'm not 100 percent sure. I asked them once and the main reason is because it lets them have like a little bit of a structure. They line up, they get prepared, they're already in kind of an idea of how they want them to walk, and how they want them to go through the school and everything. And it's okay during like the beginning of the year. Sometimes during the winter it can be a little strange because they're really cold and they want to get inside. But it lets them have some sort of regiment to it so that they can get them in.

Interviewer

How did you get connected as a father to Lincoln Elementary and Dan Fetzer's class?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Emily, the mother of my sons, she works for that school as well. And so there would be times where she wouldn't be feeling too well, and so I would go in and help substitute for her while she wasn't feeling well. So I would interact with her class and with Dan's class. And then of course every time that you go in for teacher meetings, parent teacher conferences, stuff like that, you'd interact there. But mostly the main reason is when you would go in and help out with the class, which is really kind of fun. The first time it was really weird and I was kind of nervous because the teacher's like, "Okay, here you go, this is what we're going to do. Just watch what we do." And I'm like, yay. But it's really neat. They have a really cool little way they have everything set up so it's really easy to follow. And the kids are really cool. So it was a nifty little experience and so it made me want to do it more which is kind of important. It lets me be there to see the kind of development that they're doing, so I can experience it with them.

Interviewer

So you got connected with the school because your wife works there. And then you got connected to the class through parent participation. So tell me about Dan as a teacher.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

He's a great teacher. [Laugh] Yeah, there they call him Teacher Dan. And what I like about Dan is he's very... what's the best way to describe this? Every single student and every little kid, he pays very close attention to them. He calls them

by name. He asks them how they're doing during their day. And I think that's kind of a big deal, me personally, because for me I like to talk to my kids like "How was your day, how are things going?" And it feels like you're really having that kind of a conversation with them. You're very important to them. And I think Dan does that very well. He talks to them that way. He shows that he's there, that he's paying attention to what they're saying and I think that's a huge deal. And when you watch him do the classes, it's the same thing. He'll walk them through, he'll bring them up. He's very attentive to that one particular student that he has. And he's like, okay, here's what we're going to do. And then watches them kind of do it. And he'll show them a little bit, but also what I like too is that he gives them the opportunity to try and do it on their own. Sometimes I think that teachers can lose patience fairly quickly, especially because they've been doing it for a while. And Dan's been doing this for quite some time and it doesn't seem like that's an issue for him. Not at all. He doesn't lose patience with them, he gives them the opportunity and it's like -- it's something hopefully I can start incorporating to me as being a parent. It helps me out a little bit because it helps me understand that patience is a very important factor. If I think they're not doing something right, or if I don't think they're getting it, I want to give them the opportunity to try and understand it rather than just tell them how to do it. And a lot of that I see there, and I think that's kind of important.

Interviewer

Have you learned things watching him?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Yeah. I'm a big person on -- I don't think there's anyone that can say that you know, I've got this all down. Everything's perfect. I don't have anything to worry about. I think every day's a learning experience as far as being a parent. It has to be. If something throws me off, I have to go okay, well how do I deal with that? Because it's never going to be the same thing every time. And a lot of stuff that I learned from watching Dan and even watching Emily when she teaches certain stuff in her class is that they have this point where they go okay, if something is surprising, if something is not what we were expecting, they don't lose that focus. They take that moment and go okay, here's where we're at, let's see what we can work with. And spontaneity I think was the word I was looking for where it's on the spot teaching which is kind of cool. And they don't lose that. And I'm hoping that's something -- something like that, and the patience factor is something that I want to try and add more into being as a parent. Because my parents were great parents, they really were. But even on certain (stance?) my dad would say, you know, every day was just something different. You don't get a guide book. You don't get shown how it is. A lot of it's just as you go. And he was right. So if you see something that works, you want to try and add that in. I think that's a big deal and I get a lot of that when I'm there. You know, when you see them go up in the front and they're doing the little board where they're putting the little things in, you know, which one do you like to do more and that kind of thing, I try to do that sometimes in the mornings now. Or in the

afternoons. "Which one do you like to do more? Do you want to have this for dinner or do you want to have this for dinner?" And it helps them make the decision and then I don't have that point where they go, "No, I don't want that. I don't want to eat that. I'm not gonna eat that." They made the choice. They help me cook it sometimes. And it seems like it's more exciting for them. And I got a lot of that by watching and learning.

Interviewer

How about the high-quality preschool piece of it. Are you aware of his techniques and that some money is being funneled into that classroom? Tell me about that.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

So for their teaching development, for preschoolers, they have a really good program that they set up that's they've even had -- and this is only from talking to Emily and from Dan -- when they have their monthly conferences, they all get together and they go over the program. They even have like the mayor, stuff like that, and come in and praise them for their work. And they put a lot of effort and work and study into that program. I know that it's something that goes to other schools. Other schools will ask well how do you do it? Especially for Granite. And at first I'm like, okay, that can sound like a lot of show. I'm not sure if that's something that a lot of schools will say, "No, that's something we do." But for me personally, you can see that, especially say for Connor. Because Connor's development did feel like it was very slow at first. And then he would attend the school and they told him, well, we're going to focus on this for him, that's part of what our program works for. It's part of what we get paid for, it's part of what they put the money in for. And it shows when after a period of time I can see it. Connor is much more interactive. He talks to a lot more people. And it made me feel better about it. Because, again, it can just sound like this is something they put money into it, it can be a big deal. But to see it is a bigger kind of more important, and I can see that through them. So the money that they put in, and the program that they've created actually works really well because I can see that working for him.

Interviewer

Tell me stories.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

For Connor, one of my biggest moments, because for me personally -- and I know I say that a lot -- but for me personally, it never felt like it was anything where he and I weren't connected. But I couldn't see him -- I was always concerned about interaction with other kids. Would it be a little slow for him? Will he learn at a slower pace? Would people think he was weird? Would they tease him? And it was always like a little bit of a fear for me. And one particular day, probably about maybe four months ago -- I was walking him up to school and this little girl comes up and -- this is not a joke -- she pushed me out of the

way, she knocked me out of the way. She said, "Connor!" And moved me. And took him by the hand and walked him up to the front. But then he had this huge smile on his face, he was so happy. And when she took him to the front, all these other kids came up to talk to him. And they were all around him, and they were asking him about his day and stuff like that. And he just looked really happy and content and it was just -- it was really an amazing moment for me, at least as a parent. I don't know about anyone else in the world. But for me, as a parent, I it was just like this big weight was gone and I knew okay, it works a little bit because he'll be okay there. People want to be around him. And it was really important. And a lot of that came from there. There's been a couple of occasions where I will see him now walk up to kids and go, "How was your day? How are you? How are you feeling?" And I'm like, that's amazing to me.

Interviewer

He's learning this from that school?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

And he gets it from a lot of -- everything. But the interaction, the comfortability. He's not afraid anymore. I think he was worried. Just that he didn't know how to talk to people sometimes. With us, it's easy, you're around your parents, you're around your cousins, your family all the time. But different kids, different people, and yeah, he got a lot of that from the school because it helped him interact and not feel afraid and not worry. Okay, I might learn a little bit slower but there's nothing wrong with that. And just to see it, just to have him -- I mean even just that girl just knocked me out of the way. She really wanted to hang around with Connor who he now calls his girlfriend. That's [Laugh] a completely different animal, but -- [Laugh] it's just amazing to me. It's heartwarming I guess is the word because he's happy and really that's all anybody really wants, at least for me. I just want him to be happy.

Interviewer

So do you think he's going to be on target for kindergarten? Ready to learn?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Yes, I do believe that he'll be ready for kindergarten and that he'll be on target. The main reason that I believe that he will be is because they're taking the time to work with him on that. Even, it was last week, we had parent teacher conference. Dan showed me exactly where he is, and what he's good at, and what he still needs to improve with. And he gave me ideas and showed me stuff that I could do to help him with that, and what they were going to work with him on it. And it made me feel better about the fact that I do believe we will get there. It's not a question for them of whether or not he will, but that he will get there, and this is what we're going to do to get him there. And I think that's a big deal.

Interviewer

I was so amazed at Dan's enthusiasm. He was on happy speed.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Right. It amazes to me with Dan in particular because I have two boys that can exhaust me. I could be extremely tired, but it doesn't seem like he lacks that energy. And when he sat down and he talked to me, one of the biggest things he said, and I can't say it enough is that it wasn't a question of if he doesn't do this, he won't get there. But this is what we're going to do, because he will. And that was very -- it made me feel better. Like okay, cool, we're gonna get there.

Interviewer

And you know he will.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

And I know it's something that won't happen. We have that confidence. I'm not worried.

Interviewer

Tell me about Robbie. And he goes there part-time and he also goes to the Children's Center.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

That's correct. Robbie is my youngest son. He's three. He goes to Granite two days a week, and the Children's Center five. So Monday through Friday. And then he goes to Granite Tuesday's and Thursday's from 12:30 to 3:30. And Robbie is all smarts. He likes to know everything, wants to see how everything's going. He only development work is that he has emotions that can go from I'm really, really happy to really, really really upset and there's no middle ground. It happens really fast. And when he's really, really angry it's -- it can be a little overwhelming for some. So the main reason for the Children's Center is to help him develop that. And then Granite helps him develop his learning skills which are amazing too. So. And that's pretty much how his week goes.

Interviewer

So he's doing well at Granite?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Oh, yeah. He comes home. He can count upwards of all the way up to 35 now. He can match out colors whenever he's around. And when he sees signs, he'll say what he can see in the signs as far as letters. So when he sees, let's say a stop sign, it will be the S, the T, the O, or the P. Sometimes an O gets confused with a zero, but I figure that's okay. [Laugh] It's within the ballpark. And that's -- he's really cool with that. And -- I don't know, Robbie is... between the two of them, I'm not amazed at what they can do together. And they even help each other now which is I think partly between Granite helping Connor interact a little bit more in school with other kids. It helps them interact really well as brothers because they'll tell each other, "Well, no, that's not right." Or Robbie will

say something to Connor like, "No, no, I don't think that's the right color," or "no, red means go," or something. And they don't get mad at each other in that capacity. If they get mad at each other it's because they want the same toy. But if it's something where they're telling each other, you know, "that's not right," or "this is different," they don't really get mad at each other for it, which is kind of cool to see. Because you would think it would be. Like when my sisters would tell me that I was doing something wrong it made me feel less intelligent, I'd get a little offensive. But not for those two.

Interviewer

So tell me about the Children's Center, what it provides for Robbie?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

The Children's Center does a lot of emotional development for Robbie now. And mostly how that works is that they will see how he works in groups and whether or not certain activities they do can make him upset. He can get very much like this is mine, and I want to have it, and it's all me, and not really want to share. And he can get really, really angry over it. And they help him understand the difference of okay, this is a group activity, so everybody needs to try. Everybody needs to interact. And they really help him understand his feelings and his emotions, which is kind of unique. They'll take these moments where they'll sit him down and they'll ask him how he's feeling, which is interesting for a three-year-old at first when I saw them do it. But it's cool to see because now he'll say, "I'm okay." Or "I'm a little angry." Instead of getting angry or getting upset which I think is kind of important. And he'll tell us now if he's really angry or really upset. Also something that I think is really cool that he does is if he does get really, really angry, one of the techniques that they helped us with and that we do is that we tell him, take a breath, breathe, and we go --[takes deep breath and blows out] -- and he does it, which is kind of cute. He goes -- [takes breath]. So if he's crying a lot or if he's really angry, it's interesting to me that he will stop. Sometimes with kids that age they'll just keep going. It doesn't matter what you're telling them. But he does stop, he does take his breath, he does take a moment. And then he's calm and then you ask him, "Okay, what's wrong? What are you feeling?" Instead of saying, "This is bad, this is what you're doing wrong," "what is it you're feeling?" And then he tells you and then you say, "Well why do you feel that way?" And then he tells you.

Interviewer

Amazing.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

It's really cool actually.

Interviewer

The staff is probably amazing.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

They really are. They're really, really cool. And again, the same thing with the Children's Center. Also Granite does really well is that they're very informal. They talk to you like -- as a parent, they talk to you, and say, "How are you today, how are things going?" You're comfortable talking to them because it feels like you're just talking to one of your friends. They tell you, okay, this is what he did today, this is how it went kind of thing. They know who you are, they know who each parent is. They know how the parent's days are as well. I think that's kind of unique too. You don't see that very often. And it makes everybody's relationships cool I think.

Interviewer

Awesome.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Something else too with the Children's Center. Robbie's always really happy to go and really happy when he's done. And it's the same with Granite. Connor is happy to go to school. And he's happy to come home. And there's no -- "oh, don't make me go to school," crying thing at all. I think we had it once with Connor when he couldn't quite understand why he was going. And that's never been a factor since. And with Robbie it hasn't been at all. And I think that shows too, you can get a little uncomfortable if you feel like when you're at school, no one's really understanding you. Nobody really cares really what you're going through. And I think that's different for them.

Interviewer

Yeah, so the Children's Center and Granite have become a safe haven.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Yeah, they're not afraid. They like to go.

Interviewer

So this might seem awkward to you, but what is your economic status? Are you struggling right now? Are you doing okay as a parent?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Financially it's not easy. I don't... it's not something where you can say -- you have to prioritize, I guess, financially, as a parent, especially now. Even single or together. You have to prioritize what's more important. The kids need shoes, the kids need clothes, the kids need stuff for school. Those are the priorities. Right now, you could say for me personally, what are my priorities? Nothing is more important than it is for them, and I know Emily feels the same way. And you can look at my shoes -- I have huge holes in my shoes. I need to replace my shoes. I can't because I need to make sure my kids have what they need. And I don't -- sometimes I know that I have to work harder or longer. I have to spend

time at work that can be exhausting. Ten, twelve hour days working on things that can just remind you how horrible the outside world can be. But, all of that's worth it, if I had the money that I need to take care of the kids. And yeah, it's not always great. It won't be. And I've personally tried to work to get there. But as long as they're happy and they have what they need. Like a couple of years ago I remember my dad telling me a story about their finances because I was really upset about ours. And he was telling me this whole story about what they were going through and I had no idea when I was that age. No clue. Because they didn't make it feel that way for us. They got what we needed and we were happy. So I'm hoping that I can follow that same path. Because yeah, it's not great.

Interviewer

What do you want for yourself?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Me personally? I want to be a really good dad. I think that's the only thing I've ever really wanted in my entire life. Sorry. I want to be able to give them at least a decent enough life so that they can accomplish what they should accomplish. I think before you have children -- I know I was -- I could be very... self-centered. It was what I needed. It's what I wanted. It's where I needed to go. And then you see your kids for the first time, and then you're like, okay, everything that you do doesn't matter anymore. It matters what they need. And that's really all I want. I know that sounds weird because I would like to say, yeah, I would like to move up in the world and... I just want them to -- what I want more than anything is I want to be able to get them what they need. That's it.

Interviewer

What do you want for your boys? Where do you see them?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Well, and I think every parent would do this -- I think they do. I think they're like what do you think -- what do you see your children as? What do you think they will do? I think I want my children to have a life where they feel safe and fulfilled and happy. And doing something that -- and it may not be the greatest job or the greatest anything in the world, but whatever they're doing, I want them to feel happy in it and accomplished in it. And I want them to feel like they did the work they wanted to do to get there and not be afraid. I think that's something that happens to a lot of people. I know it happened to me. But there's so many things that can make people be afraid to want to do anything that they want -- limitations -- money, financially, your own personal fears, what people perceive of you. I want them to be able to go, well I'm happy with me and I'm happy with what I can accomplish, and I'm happy with who I am. And I think that that's a big deal for anyone, for me anyway. I know it sounds the same, but... that's all they really need is to know that the people around them love them and that whatever they decide, whoever they are, whatever they want to be, whether

it be comic book artist, comedian, a doctor, whatever it is, as long as they're happy, I'm happy. That's it. I kind of think that [Laugh] sometimes I kind of think that they might be more sports oriented than I was because they certainly are better at it than I was now, it seems like. That might be just a dad saying something, but I think in the end that that's really what should matter. I see them hopefully being happy. Whatever that is. Whatever choices they make.

Interviewer

You're an amazing dad. Anything else you want to tell us?

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

Sure. So for Lincoln Elementary, what I can say about Lincoln is that they spend the time with each child. They focus on each child. Those teachers, Dan in particular, each child matters to them, Ian to Isabelle. Each child matters to them. I can't think of a bigger praise you can give any other school because I know it's not 12 kids in a room and they're just going, "Okay, here's what we're going to teach all 12 of these kids." I see them say, "This is what I'm going to teach you and you and you and you." And for any parent, if you decide to take that opportunity to go there, that's what you can expect. And that's important. It's a huge deal. And as far as being a parent --

Interviewer

And this is for the preschool program.

Andy (Robert) Abeyta

And this is for the preschool program. And for being a parent [Laugh] what I could say about being a parent is that... when I was six years old -- and I don't even know if he remembers it very much, my dad -- when I was six years old I had the worst experience at school. It was the worst experience. Teasing. All this stuff. And I came home and I was real, real, real upset and I really wasn't very good at that point of trying to understand how to talk to anybody. And my dad came back from work, and he was just walking into the house, and he saw me sitting in the corner by the couch, and he goes, "What's wrong with Andy?" And my mom's like, "Oh, he's been acting like that all day." And he put his briefcase down, walked over to me, pulled me up, sat me down, and he looked at me, and he said, "What's wrong?" And I just had a bad day. He didn't say anything. He said, "Okay, let's go for a walk." We had a 7-11 that was across the street. And he took me across the street, bought me some candy, and he bought me my first comic book which was just a Super Man comic book, that's all it was. Just a bunch of pictures. And he read it to me. And the whole idea of the story was that Super Man had just lost his powers, and he had to learn how to get past it just by being him. And I remember my dad telling me, when the story was all over going, "No matter what happens, no matter what life throws at you, you can get past it. It will be okay." And that was it. But he spent the time with me, and he took the opportunity. And I think that's the only thing you can really do as a parent. It's one of the biggest things I ever learned was just -- he'll be there.

We'll be there no matter what. Even if you don't want to talk about it -- because again, I couldn't express, and I didn't tell him really what was going on. He just said that, and that was it, and I was 100 percent better. So to me, my dad will always be my super man for that. And I just want my kids to feel like they know I will be there for them like that. So I think that's what you need to do as a parent. Because even when they're older and they have problems with girls or with school or with bullies or with friends, you can't force them to tell you, but what you can do is be there and say, "Well here's what I can do if you need it." So they know. And they'll tell you. That's it.