

Don't Touch That Dial

By John Roozen

Courtney was not having a good day. We'd better call it a bad day – an awful day. This day stunk. Everything seemed out of control. Have you had days like that?

At lunch, a boy had grabbed her Granny Smith apple, tossed it up in the air to tease her, and dropped it. It smooshed on the ground. It really only cracked a little, but to Courtney it was smooshed. It was not cool to smoosh a tart but wonderful Granny Smith apple.

Then there was the spaghetti sauce she spilled on her white blouse, and the essay she turned in that was missing page three. Oh, and don't forget the mud puddle on the way to school. Why did she wear her good shoes on a day like this? I could tell you about the fall during soccer and the perfume in her eye – but why bother. You get the picture.

Thank goodness school was over and she could walk home. Mope home, really. She decided to take a different way using the path along the creek. Maybe she could hide and outsmart the troubles that were following her today. Her eyes were fixed on the ground as she plodded slowly along the pathway.

Hmmm, what was that? There was a gray box lying on the ground. It wasn't a cheap cardboard box - it was a strong metal box with a latch. And it was just sitting there under a tree on the bank of the creek.

Courtney looked up and down the pathway. No one was around – not a soul. That's weird; whose box was it? Was there money in the box? That would be cool. Courtney looked harder for the owner, checking the edge of the creek, peering down the other side. She walked a little ways in each direction to see if anyone was around. She even yelled out, "Anybody lose something!" No one appeared.

Courtney bent down. There was no lock on the latch. She imagined stacks of dollar bills inside the box – maybe they would be stacks of twenty dollar bills. Wow! She slowly pulled up on the latch and lifted the lid. Dang, no money.

Inside were dials and switches – a bunch of them. It was some sort of electronic control box. She immediately got a weird feeling that someone was watching her. Slowly she turned her head around, expecting to be eyeball to eyeball with

the angry owner of the box. Again, no one was there, but she still had that feeling. She then looked in the one direction she had forgotten – straight up. Eyeball to eyeball with...Mr. Squirrel.

Chit Chit Chit Chit Chit! The minute he was discovered, Mr. Squirrel began chattering an annoying sound. Courtney's feeling of being watched went away.

Now, back to the box. Courtney flipped on the switch marked "P". Maybe "P" for power," she thought. But no lights turned on. The batteries must be dead, she thought. She picked up the box – it was light - and looked for a power cord. Nothing – no compartment for batteries either. She turned another dial. Nothing happened.

Suddenly, it began to rain. "Perfect!" Courtney said out loud. "Just perfect. What a day." Courtney quickly closed the lid, tucked the box under her arm and ran for home. She didn't have a raincoat and of course still had on her good shoes. She cradled the box in her arms as best that she could to keep it dry.

Once at home, she put the box on her dresser, right next to... you guessed it - page three of her school essay. Courtney changed her wet clothes and wiped off her muddy "good" shoes. Then, she began doing her homework - American History. She had already read the chapter at school, and so just had to answer ten questions. It was quick and easy, and she

placed the homework page...in her backpack. Duh, she's not going to make that mistake again. She even put the now-late page three of her essay in the backpack, too.

Courtney wondered again about the box she had found. She began flicking the switches. Some were dials where you could choose a number between 1 and 10. Others were just on and off switches. She began to play with some of the dials until her mother called her for dinner.

At dinner, the TV was on. "We interrupt this program for a special weather bulletin," the TV said. "There have been unexpectedly high winds in the city with gusts up to 60MPH. Temperatures have also dramatically changed from a hot 80° to a very cold 38° in just a short period of time. We will keep you informed of any new changes."

Courtney finished her dinner and then spent the rest of the evening playing on her computer. Before going to bed, she looked at the strange box one more time to see if it had a company name on it. Nothing. She turned all of the switches off, just in case it had a battery. She didn't want to drain the batteries. She set the dials all back to zero except for one dial. She turned it to 10 - just because.

The next morning, everyone was shouting. Courtney woke up in a flash. She rushed out into the living room, where the entire family was crowding around the front door. Courtney

peeked around her dad to see out the door. “Whoa!” There was two feet of snow... and it was the month of May.

The TV was on and the weather reporter was acting like it was a miracle event. “Two feet of snow, and it is still coming down!” said the weatherman.

A thought popped into Courtney’s head. She ran back to her room and opened the grey box. The only dial that was set to high had the letter “S” on the dial. “Snow!” she said out loud. She turned the dial back to zero and looked out her window. The snow had stopped. She turned the “S” dial to 2, and it began to snow just a little. She turned it to 10 and the snow came down like gangbusters.

“Mom! Dad!” She yelled. When they came, she told her mother to move the “S” dial. “Dad, watch out the window,” Courtney ordered. Back and forth her mother changed the dial, and the snow started and stopped along with it.

“This is impossible,” her father said. Her father looked at the box and turned on the “B” switch. “SWOOSH!” The wind outside blew hard against the house. Quickly the snow began to pile up on the window.

“Blizzard,” her little brother shouted out. “‘B’ is for blizzard.” He had come into the bedroom to check out all of the commotion.

Her father turned off the “B” switch and the wind stopped. He turned off the “S” dial and the snow stopped. Her father reached to turn on another switch, but his wife yelled, “No! You don’t know what it will do. I think this box is real. Where did you get this box, Courtney?” she asked.

Courtney explained how she had found it. They all stood looking at the box. “How about the “H” dial,” Courtney said. “The heat will melt the snow.”

“What if “H” is for hurricane?” her brother suggested, taunting a little. “Maybe the “V” is for volcano and the “E” is for earthquake.” Her little brother got a big grin on his face. He was pleased with himself for his quick guesses.

“This is ridiculous,” her father said, and turned on the “E” switch. Immediately the house began to shake. Pictures fell off of the walls and Courtney’s lamp fell off the dresser, shattering on the floor. Her father quickly turned the switch back off. Minutes later they could hear the sounds from the living room TV, where the reporter was shouting excitedly about an earthquake. That reporter was having a busy day.

“Told ya,” said her brother triumphantly.

All of them took a few steps back from the box, and then all sat down on the bed. “It’s amazing,” her mother said.

“I still say it is impossible,” her father added, “but I’m worried anyway.”

“It’s scary cool,” said her little brother.

It’s mine,” said Courtney. “I could help the farmers, and make it rain just when their crops need it.”

“We can make it snow tons every Monday, and get out of school,” her little brother added.

“We could become the most accurate weather forecaster in the world,” her mother chimed in with a smile. “Still it seems impossible.” Everybody nodded in agreement.

During the next week, they tested out the other controls. “R” was for rain. That was the first dial Courtney had tried by the creek. “L” was for lightning. “C” was for cold and “H” made it hot. “W” was for windy. The dials were easier to test. You could first put them on low settings like 1 or 2 to try them out. The switches, like the “T”, were risky. They thought it would be thunder. Instead, it was a tornado. That was a close call. The “P” dial never seemed to do anything. The family decided not to test V, A, and F. They thought up some scary things that could happen – volcanoes, avalanches or floods.

“This box is a phenomenal invention,” her father proclaimed. “We need to call the authorities, maybe the police, to have them inspect it.”

“Wait!” his wife interrupted. “They will just take it away to a laboratory. It will be on the news, and the real inventor will come to claim it. He will be famous and become rich, and we

will just be that family that found a box and then turned it in. Maybe we should keep the box and keep using it ourselves.”

Courtney liked her mother’s way of thinking. Her brother liked it too because he wanted to become famous. Courtney’s father said that they should think on it.

Later that day, Courtney’s father announced that he had called the TV station, and they were coming to the house to film the box. “It is not the authorities,” her father said defending himself, “and we might get a reward or at least get famous.”

“The authorities will come when they hear about it,” said her mother, “and then they will take it away.”

Courtney felt betrayed. It was her box – she found it. She reacted by slyly grabbing the box and running out the back door. Off she went towards the edge of town to a big open field, where she quickly buried the box.

The TV station came, but with no box to see, they called it a hoax and left the house. Courtney’s family was not mad at her. They all understood. But they decided that it was best not to leave the box in the ground. The rain might ruin it.

However, when they went back to the field, Courtney could not find the box. She thought she could find it by the fresh dirt from the hole. But there were fresh dirt piles everywhere.

“Moles,” her father explained. “They dig underground tunnels

and push the dirt out on top of the ground. They looked and dug for hours without finding the box. Her father even bought a metal detector, but there were no beeps to indicate metal. Every day for a week, they spent time looking in the field.

Months passed. Then one night at dinner, her mother asked an obvious question. “What weather setting did you leave on when you buried the box?” Everyone was looking at Courtney.

“Only D”, Courtney said. “I heard that farmers like a drizzle for their crops. It keeps them moist all of the time.” The family became quiet. They were all thinking the same thing. It had been sunny and hot every day since she had buried the box. No drizzling rain.

“Drought!” her brother exclaimed. Wow, he was quick with those letters.

May had gone by without any rain, and June was the hottest and driest on record. They were now into July and the farmer’s crops were dying of thirst. Another few weeks of the drought and the crops would all be ruined.

The family was desperate. They went to the city leaders, told their story and asked for help with a bulldozer, but no one believed them. They hired a bloodhound dog to track the smell, but he didn’t find anything.

Courtney went to the big field every day with her shovel. Then, on July 22nd - there it was – the box - lying right on top of the ground.

The lid was open and dirt was piled up inside and all over the box. “Moles,” Courtney said to herself. They had a tunnel to build, and so pushed it up and out of their way.

Immediately, Courtney reached for the “D” switch to turn off the drought. It was dirty and hard to move. She pushed hard until it finally turned off, but it also broke off. Courtney took the box and headed for home. She felt relieved when there were already clouds building up on the horizon. The drought was over.

Once home with the good news, the family tried to clean the box. The dirt made the dials hard to move and some of the switches were completely stuck.

“Let’s take it apart,” Courtney said. The box did not open easily. It had no screws or bolts. When they were finally able to pry it open, they saw that there were no wires, no circuit board, no electronic chips, and no batteries. It was just the simple switches and dials and lots of dirt.

And once opened, it no longer worked. The dials did nothing. The switches had no effect on the weather. It was ruined.

They sent the box to laboratories for examination. The analysis was always the same, “It is just a bunch of switches and dials with nothing attached. There is no way for this box to do anything at all.”

The broken box has sat in Courtney’s bedroom for years now. Every time a strong wind or a sudden rain occurs, Courtney always wonders if there is another box out there somewhere.

The End

You: “Hey, what did the ‘P’ switch do?”

Me: “Beats me.”

You: “Hmmm. Maybe ‘P’ is for a Perfect Day or...”

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