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The Canada Option – by Patrick F. Bassett

Every spring brings a season of manic panic for Manhattan parents trying to get their kids into independent pre-schools in a locale where demand far exceeds supply and hence anxiety over the admissions interview for one's four- or five-year old is cause for significant perturbations (and prepping of one's child). The last interesting example of this phenomenon was evidenced in the "marshmallow test" that infamously was used by at least one NYC school in the pre-school interview process: "Here is one marshmallow, and you can eat it now, but if you wait 20 minutes, I'll give you two marshmallows." The results were thought to be indicative of maturity: i.e., those children who could control themselves at age 4 or 5 to manage delaying immediate gratification were surely destined to succeed in one's school (and presumably to get into one or more elite colleges and universities 13 or so years after the pre-school interview). We don't have the longitudinal data, sad to say, on whether or not the test had accurate predictive value.

Now word of a new twist on the admissions interview, this time a "find the precocious preschoolers who pay attention to the daily news." A friend told me of his nephew's 5-year old "admission interview" in NYC this season, and we remarked about the culture of the ongoing challenge of prepping one's toddler for the interview remains a common, but wasted effort, since one never knows what one's child will be asked or how he or she would respond. In this case, the interview dialog went like this:

- Admissions Officer: "Do you know that we have a presidential election season going on?"
- 5-year Old Boy: "Yes."
- Admissions Officer: "Do you know who the candidates are?"
- 5-year Old Boy: "Yes."
- Admissions Officer: "Do you have a favorite?"
- 5-year Old Boy: "Yes."
- Admissions Officer: "Who might that be?"
- 5-year Old Boy: "Donald Trump"
- Admissions Officer: "Why is that?"
- 5-year Old Boy, excitedly: "Because if Mr. Trump wins, we're going to move to Canada, and I've never been to Canada!"

From the mouth of babes.