

He was 2 ½ years old and needed a booster seat to sit at the kitchen table. Holding his sippy cup full of water he came to me and asked to play a game. Candyland, the game I gave him at Christmas.

“This won’t take long,” I remembered thinking to myself. We settled in at the old kitchen table, he asked for pretzels, and the game began. He played the entire game, munching on his snacks and chirping away like a toddler magpie. I was a little surprised that he made it until the end of the game. I was even more surprised when he won the game. I taught him to say “Winner, winner, chicken dinner.” We said it together at least 20 times. And then we’d giggle like a couple of teenage girls.

“Play again?” he asked. So, we played again and then it began. Smack talk: telling me, his beloved grandmother and favorite babysitter that I was - what?- GOING DOWN. Where did my first-born, tow-headed, delightful grandson learn those words? And, I was not GOING DOWN.

Most likely I lost Game 2 because I was listening to him prattle away and thinking about how precocious he sounded. Or maybe I lost because his tiny chubby hands kept inserting the winning cards into the top of the card deck. Where he would draw them and move within two turns of the Candy Castle. I don’t really know what happened. We chanted “Winner, winner” a few more times. My enthusiasm for board games was quickly waning. Watch a show on Disney Channel? Read our favorite book together? Take a nap?

Game 3 and this grandmother needed a sippy cup and some pretzels, or maybe a glass of white wine. My grandson had stopped eating or drinking. This child was in it to win it. Why did he always have to have the green player and why does he always get to go first? Who made up these rules? All of these are rhetorical questions, of course.

His mother breezed through the kitchen. I grumbled to her about the way he played. “Cheating again?” she asked as she smiled at her only child. It was quite obvious that my daughter - his mother - was secretly very proud. He won Game 3 in record time and we were both done for the day. I checked my daughter’s fridge for wine and found juice boxes and some green grapes. I hate green grapes.

I took a picture of the game board so that I could remember the first day we played an actual game together. I still have that picture on my phone, and also I posted it on my Facebook page. Four years have passed and he has systematically and ruthlessly “cleaned my clock” at Guess Who, Go Fish, Game of Life (his absolute favorite), Uno, Monopoly Junior, Hungry Hippo, and Chutes and Ladders. We played chess when he turned 4. He moved to a new house and I think he lost the chessboard. I hope so! Battleship has become the only board game where a grandmother with a master’s degree and pretty decent SAT scores has any chance of winning.

“Can we play a new game next time I come by?” I sweetly implored. “No,” he boomed in his bossy little toddler voice. I was beginning to hate the sound of “Winner, winner, chicken dinner.” I ate my pretzels and drained my juice box and drove myself home.