

Overview

As I sit here at my PC after nearly ten years of parenthood, and two kids later; looking back, what have I learned over this time, or are my brain cells too frazzled to present my thoughts coherently anymore?

Well, I know the whole baby phase was so intense. I think I went around smelling of, and covered in baby food, and all other things I probably shouldn't have been covered in, for quite some time. At least till they could walk!

The worst part was, that some things I was covered in, were hidden from view. For example, the back of my hair, hand marks along the back of my top and trousers, so that I may have looked presentable enough from the front, but hew presto, turn around, and it looked like I got into a food fight, and the child won!

My house always looked like it had been burgled. There was stuff everywhere. It was like an obstacle course, and at times it still is, when my kids friends are over, and deposit shoes, wet socks, jackets and whatever they happened to be holding at the time, when they come to my house.

If they are all hungry or thirsty, then I think you can imagine the mess amplified!

One way to clear them all out, when I had enough, was to say "okay guys time to tidy up now" and boy, mass exodus, as if someone set off the fire alarm. Although come to think of it, they would probably all want to stick around then, just to see the fire, and see what happens next!

If I got burned to a cinder, it would make for an even better story, when they would meet their other friends, but thankfully for me, that never happened, and touch wood, never will!

Anyway, while all these memories are still fresh in my mind, I decided to write things down. Maybe I will blackmail my kids in the future (only joking), but I am sure that when they have kids of their own, they will have a better understanding of what comes with the territory!

You can either handle it good, bad or not at all. I am still trying to figure out which is best!

So sit back, take a breather, and I hope you will accompany me in part, on my journey to a PhD in Parenthood.

1. Setting The Scene

This story is a bit different in that there is no beginning, no middle and no end. The beginning is a hazy memory, the middle sometimes seems to last forever while the end; who wants to talk about the end! At the moment I am at the nice stage, where my kids actually like me, pay me complements, boast about me (how sweet), even though saying my mom is bigger than yours, isn't exactly what I want to hear as a complement!

Of course, they want me to live forever, as opposed to wishing me dead. Long may that last, because I am sure, there will come a time that I will simply drive them mad by being around at all! Even sharing the same air will be enough to send them gagging, so I might as well make the very most of this moment in time. No doubt it will pass all too fast.

The way I see it, it is really a hands on, dive in there, plenty of deep breaths, count to 10 and do your best kind of job.

It is also about survival, and sometimes taking a gamble, working against the odds and all that!

Now that I have said all the above, let me just set the scene for where we live, and our typical or atypical day, depending on how you look at it.

We live in a little town, near the coast of Ireland, in what would be termed "a nice place to live." Kids travel freely, calling to their friends' houses, no invitation needed!

We live in a modest sized house, which looks onto a nice green area, where we can safely keep an eye on our kids from such a distance, that our presence isn't obvious, but we are still there in the background to step in if needed.

Anyway, a little bit about us. We are a family of four. My husband Tim is the sensible one in the family. He leads a double life! One when he goes to work every day, and the other when he comes home to us! People think I am the glue that holds this family together, but in reality I think he does. He makes everything possible. They say opposites attract. Yes I can confirm that for sure!

He helps me take life more seriously, and I help him take life less seriously!

Then there is my daughter Emily 8 and my son Patrick who is 6. They are like chalk and cheese, but I know they love each other. This is especially evident, when they have a falling out with a friend, and the other will stick up for them, share their sweets with them, and say all the right things they want to hear.

Of course, me being the parent, try to rationalize everything, calm things down and assure them that this is a temporary blip in their childhood, or words to that effect, that a child will understand. Otherwise, they would look at me, as if I was speaking a new language. “Talk sense Mom” I can almost hear them say. “What is a blip?”

Then there is me, Clare. What can I say about myself?

I work part time from home, working for an international best-selling artist. I handle all his queries, and I have the flexibility and freedom to come and go as I please. He is a bit quirky and eccentric like me, so we get on just fine being thousands of miles apart! I think any closer and it definitely wouldn't work.

He sent me a stuffed parrot for my fortieth birthday, with a “thinking of you” note. I am still trying to figure out the significant of that note, combined with the stuffed parrot! Is it a deeply philosophical gesture, or just something someone quirky and eccentric would send! Probably so! At least the kids think it is a cool present and like to play pirates with it!

Well enough said, you will get to know me a whole lot better as you read on, so I won't form any opinions on myself. I will let you do that!

Anyway welcome to my home, my life, my adventure towards a PhD in Parenthood.

2. How The Day Begins

Okay, how the day begins, of course differs between school days, weekends and holidays. The reverse happens in our house. Kids rise early at the weekend and on holidays, but sleep in on the school mornings!

I kid you not!

Monday to Friday of school days, my kids need a number of types of wake up calls. First, I make some noise in general and open their doors, then I open the curtains. Get out their clothes. Say good morning, kiss them and then gently move the covers off them. All this is done in stages, so they can gradually wake up!

To them, it seems like the middle of the night, even if it is bright, and so I safely escort them down the stairs, through half opened eyes, and guiding them to the sofa, where they collapse again.

I give them a few minutes to make the transition from the land of sleep, to the land where school is on the agenda, before asking anything of them. Believe me, I learned this the hard way.

PhD Notes To Self

Seriously could I possible admit this caper to anyone without being ridiculed, and rightly so? This is insane. Need to source “rise and shine” multi vitamins to kick start their day, so I can eliminate half the steps or just let them get on with it, while I get on with everything else I need to do too!

Anyway the million dollar question comes next. “What would you like for breakfast?” It’s not a trick question, and it is not like I ever asked that question before. Yet I get “the look.”

“What can we have?”

Now breakfast doesn’t change that much in my house. We do cereal, toast, milk or fresh juice on a school morning. We have time on our side at weekends to be more flamboyant at breakfast time, so for five mornings a week during the school term, I am still asked “What can we have?”

I rattle off the list of foods available for breakfast, and am met with disapproving, unimpressed glances. Thankfully, they do settle on something edible, easy to rustle up and moderately healthy.

Phew off to a good enough start!

While they eat, I prepare the school lunch. Yes I know I should do all that stuff the night before, will I ever learn! The problem is, the night before I am still tacking the night before stuff, and that does take up the night before, you follow?

Each of them like different things, no surprise there, so I pull things from the fridge and cupboard that they like, but which meets the school criteria for lunch time snacks. Thankfully the school have a ban on certain foods. One less battle I have to deal with, because whatever the school says, they know there is no negotiation!

Next hurdle is for them to get dressed! They have done it themselves for years, but on school mornings, it seems to be a real struggle. The clothes are too tight, too stretchy, too itchy, shoes too small overnight, socks have prickly things in them, that I can't seem to find, and their hair is sticking up.

All the while this is going on, I do not have time on my side. Tick tock tick tock, the clock face mocks me, as I try to negotiate, problem solve, multi-task and stay calm through it all.

Finally it's down to brushing of teeth, and praying toothpaste doesn't spill on their clothes. Yes, another success! Clothes intact, and no white stains to have to rub off today, just plenty of toothpaste to clean from the sink area!

At last, out the door, school bags loaded up, but no, not quite yet! A pit stop to the bathroom is called for, by at least one child. It usually starts with Patrick, and I think he falls asleep in there with the door locked, so I cannot do a sneaky check. While Emily is waiting to go to school, she realizes, just as he is flushing the toilet, that she needs to go now. Tick tock tick tock.

Then it's the last minute protest, "why do we need to go to school anyway?"

Where do I start!

PhD Notes To Self

Try to get kids up fifteen minutes earlier. Note: This will only work if I keep the pressure on them to eat, dress, toilet, teeth etc. with a few minutes to spare (seriously who am a kidding?)

Try to get kids to the bathroom sooner. The thing is, if they go too soon, they will need to go again. Run trials and take notes! Don't make it look obvious I am taking notes in front of kids or we will definitely be late or even later!

Print off list of breakfast items and give them 1 minute to tick what they want otherwise tell them I decide! Novelty should last all of 1 week but at least it will buy me another week till I think of something else. Or just have 2 cereals, thus halving the choice. Why didn't I think of this sooner! Am I for real? Just reading back on my notes, I seriously question my sanity!

We take the short cut again, and run through the field. So much for trying to straighten down their hair. It is sticking up again, in the bracing, westerly breeze that frequents this island of ours.

At last, they get to school, re-tie the laces that have come undone, and wipe the grass from their shoes. Another success, they arrive on time. An unusual occurrence for us all, and a bit embarrassing seeing that we only live a field away as the crow flies. Of course I am still trying to explain to the kids about the meaning of the crow flying!

I continue on for my walk, after dropping them off at the school gates, more to gather my thoughts and take a breather, before facing back to a house left in chaos.

I would love to be one of those parents to say to another, "oh do come back to mine for a coffee," but if I do invite someone back, I almost feel I have to give a disclaimer and apologize for the mess. As if it's a once off bad day at my house as opposed to the norm!

People say they find my house homely. Thanks (I think)!

No, you won't find clear spaces, vases of fresh flowers on the counter tops, sparking windows and the like, but I will always find a place for you to sit down (I may have to move something) and you will always be welcome!

3. Feeding Time At The Zoo

I get everything done in time for the “meet and greet” of my kids, as they trek home from school. Their class mates accompany them part of the way, till they spilt the journey finally going home to their own houses. As I see them approach, I generally go out to meet them, and carry their heavy bags. They look world weary, except on Fridays then they know they have the whole weekend ahead of them!

Some days they may get home a little earlier, and I may not always be outside to meet them.

It always amuses me, when my kids come through the door, and with their first gasp of air, they shout “Mom where are you?”

Sometimes, I am tempted to shout “I am on the third floor, west wing darling.” Our house is not that big that I can’t be tracked down in a matter of seconds, let alone minutes!

If they both come through the door at the same time, they split up, to track me down faster. If I happen to be in the bathroom, then they just sit on a bed and watch the door waiting for me. No pressure!

When I do appear, they both talk together. It’s like a competition for attention, and not an order of whose request is more important than the others. In their eyes, whether it is “where is my scooter?” to “where are my boots?” are vitally important in their eyes and need an answer right now!