

Through My Child's Eyes



Your little one has so much to teach you. Are you paying attention?

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Through My Child's Eyes

For Phil, who walks this journey beside me and for Tyson & Jack
who have taught me more about life and love than I could ever
hope to teach them.

*'While we try to teach our children all about life,
our children teach us what life is all about.'*

Angela Schwindt



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Introduction

Nothing can truly prepare you for parenthood. The tears and tantrums, toilet training, sleepless nights, the worry that you're not doing it right, or the indescribable love that changes everything.

As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I promptly bought every parenting manual on the market, determined to 'get it right.' But nothing could prepare me for what was to come...

In the few short years since becoming a mother, I have learnt so much more about life than in all my years prior, and from the most surprising source... my children.

I have two boisterous boys, who have taught me more than I could ever teach them.

Children see the world through untainted eyes and what they show us is extraordinary, if only we take the time to notice.

These are some of the lessons motherhood has taught me.

You can't have it all

‘Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.’ **1 Thessalonians 5:18**

So, I pictured myself working from home after the birth of baby number one. And that's what I told my boss...

'This is how it will work... bub will sleep peacefully on a rug beside my desk and I'll take breaks every few hours to feed him. As he grows older, he'll sit quietly on his play mat and entertain himself with a plethora of toys while I work.' It just made sense. Just not to my boss.

I'm sure he was secretly laughing on the inside, because he was too exhausted to laugh out loud, due to his own failed attempt at working from home with his own bub.

'But I'm a woman, I can multi-task. Women are made for this kind of thing. It's in our waters, or our genes, or something.' My protests fell on deaf ears and my time as an employee came to a bitter-sweet end.

Okay, these are the things they don't tell you in ante-natal class:

1. Babies lie quietly on a rug beside your desk for about 4 weeks, then they never lie quietly again (except while sleeping).
2. Babies don't care about deadlines. They want to eat NOW.
3. When you leave a room, baby boys honestly believe you're never coming back and cry accordingly.
4. Little boys also aren't interested in playing by themselves. They want to play with mummy... all the time.

Being a working mother meant a life of perpetual guilt. I felt guilty when I was working because I should be spending time with the kids. I felt guilty when I was spending time with the kids because I should be working.

Working from home brings a whole new level of guilt because not only did I not have time to wash and clean but I also had to live and work amongst the mess. My inbox was full and so was my wash basket.

Can you really have it all? Women have been asking this question since we first unchained ourselves from the kitchen sink and took our first tentative steps towards a career.

My answer is: You can't always have it all... but you can be thankful for what you have.

I love working with my husband in our business. I love having adult conversations during the day. I love every second I spend with my kids (minus the tantrums) and I love my life (most of the time).

Being a working mother is harder than I ever imagined it could be but I wouldn't have it any other way.

It's the Simple Things

‘Don’t hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars. It’s obvious, isn’t it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.’ 1 **Matthew 6:19-21**

Remember the Mastercard TV Commercial? The one where the toddler is having more fun playing with the box that her expensive toys arrived in, rather than actually playing with her new toys? Well, perhaps she's onto something?

Over the years, we've accumulated a cluster of expensive toys from family and friends. Really, we have more toys than we have space to put it all. And you've never really experienced pain until you've stepped on a Lego piece, barefoot, at 3 in the morning. I would describe it as worse than child birth.

So, why do we have all this stuff? Recently, Phil made Tyson a paper aeroplane. Tyson literally spent hours playing with it – mesmerised by Phil's skilful handiwork. He even slept with it tucked under his arm... and it's still one of his most prized possessions.

His other prized possession is a paper bag which was part of a Kids Church craft activity. He stores all his treasures in it – and by 'treasures' I mean old receipts, movie tickets, collector cards etc. It's more sticky tape than paper bag these days.

I've learnt that kids ask so much less of us than we think and the simple things in life really are the best.

Chapter 3

Relish the Gentle Breeze

A hurricane wind ripped through the mountains and shattered the rocks before God, but God wasn't to be found in the wind; after the wind an earthquake, but God wasn't in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but God wasn't in the fire; and after the fire a gentle and quiet whisper.' 1 **Kings 19:11-14**

It started with an alarm I forgot to set the night before. That meant I was awoken unceremoniously by Tyson precisely half an hour late.

Flinging clothes in the general direction of two wriggling bodies, I managed to get the boys dressed in between 'computer stops,' typing furiously before a child noticed I was missing.

Jack and nappy bag over one shoulder and holding Tyson's hand, we hurtled towards the car and then charged towards playgroup, making it in record time and only 15 minutes late. Not bad.

Making our way, somewhat frazzled, back to the car, that's when I discovered the back door had been left open the entire morning – a good 3 hours! A strange combination of horror, embarrassment, anger, relief and gratitude flooded over me as I peered inside and saw nothing missing!

Starting the car, I looked over at my red faced, exhausted boys in the back seat and did a risk assessment; My next task involved a trip to the local shopping centre for a friend's birthday present. Was it worth risking a major implosion from one or both boys? I took that risk.

Lunch was pleasantly uneventful. Jack obligingly dozed in the pram as we made our way towards The Body Shop. That's when my luck ran out.

Tyson went into 'meltdown mode.' Executing the biggest tantrum I've ever witnessed. And all played out in front of a live audience. I could spot the other parents – they looked at me knowingly, no doubt thinking: 'thank goodness it's not mine this time.' But amongst those sympathetic glances were the 'Parenting Experts,' who looked on in disgust. An elderly woman actually came up to me and said: 'Is something wrong with your child?'

‘No.’ I replied , seething. ‘He’s just having a tantrum.’ And then proceeded along my walk of shame back to the car, Tyson still screaming and flailing about.

A tearful call to Phil and he was on his way home. He took the boys to the park so I could get some work done. TV off. Laptop open, sitting on the deck. Nothing but birds chirping and a gentle breeze calming me with every breath.

Kings 19:11 is an incredible challenge for busy parents: If we want to hear God’s voice, we need to relish the gentle breeze.

In all the craziness of life, I just don’t take the time to sit and breathe it in.

Now I know; if you want to have peace, be peaceful. Turn off the noise, declutter your day and don’t be afraid to say ‘no’ sometimes.

In his book ‘The Power of Positive Thinking’ Norman Vincent Peale says taking 15 minutes in quiet solitude each day is vital for the health of your mind, body and soul.

Finding that 15 minutes of ‘alone time’ each day is the challenge but it’s getting easier as the boys get older and less dependent on me for *everything*. I look forward to the day when I can read an entire chapter of my Bible completely uninterrupted. Oh the joy that will be!

Love is Tangible

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. **1 Corinthians 13:11**

It started out like most nights at our place... frantically getting dinner ready while my boys played noisily around my feet. Phil had just stepped outside to light the barbeque when we both heard an almighty 'thud!'

I absently thought to myself 'what on earth was that?' Then Phil and I looked at each other and the horror in his eyes made my heart sink. We both realised what had happened at the exact same moment... Jack had found a small gap in our hand rail and had plunged, head first, 2 ½ metres to the wooden floor below.

I froze in place and screamed 'get him!!' I pictured his limp, lifeless body on the floor below and a myriad of unspeakable thoughts went through my mind. Then... miraculously... a loud cry. He's alive! Phil defied gravity as he flew down the stairs and instinctively picked him up.

I was already on the phone, calling an ambulance. Jack's forehead had doubled in size and was distinctly purple. The operator finally made sense of my hysteria and an ambulance was on its way.

Running out the door, Jack screaming in my arms, our neighbours, Mick & Jenni, leaned over the fence for a chat and quickly assessed the situation. Phil was holding Tyson (poor, confused Tyson) and he explained the situation.

Jenni ran inside, shouting over her shoulder 'I'm coming in the ambulance with you.' How grateful I was to have someone with me who could talk sensibly to the ambos while Phil and Tyson followed behind in our car.

At the hospital, a good ½ a dozen emergency medical staff were waiting for us to arrive and pounced on Jack...

X-rays, MRIs, a cannula, poking and prodding. I sang to him in a desperate, broken voice, trying to keep him calm while I fell apart. The nurses were so gentle and kind with me, coaxing the story out of me that was still a blur in my mind.

Meanwhile, Phil had texted everyone we knew, asking them to pray for our little Jack.

By midnight, he was fast asleep. I was set up on a trundle bed beside him and sat there, at 2am, looking out at the beautiful city lights as texts and emails poured in from friends and family who were praying for Jack.

Phil's sister was already on her way to help him with Tyson at home and my mother came and sat with me in the Neurology ward for 2 days.

Day 2 was Jack's 1st birthday. His party was cancelled but he was smiling, and nothing else mattered in the whole wide world.

Finally, at about 3pm on Jack's 1st birthday, a Neurologist gave him the all clear. 'Just' a large fracture from the top of his head to his eye socket. Ouch!

My relief was palpable. Mum drove us home and as I took my first step inside, I burst into tears. I didn't know anything about post-traumatic stress syndrome but that's what I was experiencing. For weeks, whenever I heard an ambulance siren or a loud 'thud' I would jump 10ft in the air. And I'll never truly understand the impact it all had on Tyson, who still talks about it. He became super protective of his little brother – running from the other side of the house to make sure Jack was okay whenever he heard him cry. We're working through it together, that's what families do.

So, here's what tragedy has taught me...

1) Miracles happen. If you saw how far Jack fell, you'd have to believe that, too. One friend looked at the distance he fell and said: 'I have no choice but to believe you must be good friends with the man upstairs.' I truly believe an angel caught him on the way down to soften his fall.

2) Emergency workers are truly amazing people. They run a tight ship, on a tight budget, with incredible humanity and a genuine love for kids.

3) My Facebook post, written the day we arrived home from the hospital says it all: When something terrible happens, that's when you realize love is tangible. It has a face and hands, it's a kind voice, it's prayers, it's words, it's presence, it's help, it's heart. Thank you for all of the above, beautiful people in our lives. We have felt your love in our darkest moment and we feel truly blessed. Jack is doing better than we could ever have hoped and anyone who has seen how far he fell knows it's a miracle he is here with us today.

The Secret Ingredient is...

God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart. **1 Samuel 16:7**

A 3 year old's birthday party shouldn't strike fear into the heart of a parent, should it? Well, I was afraid. Very afraid...

Rewind 3 weeks to the night Phil asked Tyson what he'd like for his birthday... 'A Finn McMissile Birthday Cake,' he replied without blinking.

'Oh, have you told mummy that?' Phil asked, amused.

'No, just my friends.' He said, casually.

I couldn't help overhearing and my mind raced. Anyone who has a little boy aged 2 – 12 years has heard of Finn McMissile – a car from the Disney movie 'Cars 2.' It plays on high rotation in our house.

Those who know me well, know what a Domestic Goddess I am not. Before marrying Phil, I existed on a diet of toast and 2 minutes noodles.

Needless to say, cake decorating is not my *thang*!

I found myself suffering a severe case of 'Parenting Performance Anxiety.'

My mother was an amazing cake decorator. Each year, a week or so out from our birthdays, us kids would flick through the Women's Weekly Birthday Cake book and choose whatever design our little hearts desired. Through some kind of genetic failure, none of her creative flare was passed down to me.

So, night after night, I Googled cake designs, scoured ebay for cake moulds and asked advice from family and friends. As the day approached, my anxiety increased.

Talk about right down to the wire... an hour before our guests arrived, I started icing the packet mix cake I'd baked the night before. It was round. Finn McMissile isn't round. Thank goodness Phil suggested I surround it with liquorice so it vaguely resembled a tyre. And the finishing touch... One of Tyson's Finn McMissile toy cars lovingly placed on top.

At that moment, Tyson burst in and his face said it all. He stared at the cake with pure, unadulterated excitement. Then he ran outside telling anyone who'd listen: 'I've got a Finn McMissile birthday cake!' He was so proud.

Phew!

I needn't have worried. There's nothing like a 3 year old to remind you that life's too short to get hung up on the things that aren't your thing. And far more important than the decorations on a cake, is the love in your heart.

Choose to be Grateful

...Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. **Romans 12:1-2**

I used to really enjoy my quiet time... before kids. I'd pour over my bible, read a daily devotional and have a deeply heartfelt, eloquent prayer time.

Now my 'quiet time' is the period between when the boys go to sleep and I collapse into bed. My prayers started to go something like this: 'Dear God, thanks that Jack is nearly walking. Actually, I need to get him some new shoes. I wonder if there's a sale on. I could get Tyson some pants while I'm there. Need to iron my pants. Got to increase my iron intake... Got... to... take... zzzzzzzz.' Pretty sad, right?

The solution is all about multi-tasking.

I don't even have time to read the back of a cereal box these days, let alone my bible. No problem. While the boys are watching a Wiggles DVD in the back seat of the car, I've got 'The Message' Bible on cd, reading the bible to me from cover to cover as I head out to appointments. I think it's even better than reading it myself.

And prayer time has merged with my Journal time. To help me stay awake and to hold my attention, I've started a 'Gratitude Journal.'

It's a great way to document my day and keep track of the boys' development. I write down everything I'm grateful for each day and finish off with my prayer requests. My pledge is to only write positive, happy things in there. I'd love it if my boys discovered it one day and read all the things I'm grateful for about them.

It's also a great way to end my day on a high note. If it's been a particularly rubbish day, I'm forced to think of the silver linings and small blessings that got me through.

It's really changed my outlook on life – 'from the inside out' you might say.

I Am Beautiful

If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That's to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. **2 Corinthians 4:7**

I think a lot of women struggle to accept what they see in the mirror after becoming a mother. Some things have changed... maybe permanently.

I don't have time to preen myself like I used to. I sigh as I force a comb through the straw-like mess my hair has become. Sitting in a hairdresser's chair for 3 hours is a luxury of time and money I can no longer afford.

I gained a whopping 30 kilograms by the time I gave birth to my second child and despite thousands of sit ups, my midsection still resembles a bowl of porridge and my stretch marks seem to have taken up permanent residence.

Then, just when I'm feeling my most unlovely, Tyson looks up from his colouring in and casually announces: 'You're beautiful, mama.'

Yes, I'm an unadorned clay pot. But the good news is that the bigger my cracks appear, the brighter His light shines. I've been custom made to achieve the purpose God has set before me. My past, my flaws, my vulnerabilities and weaknesses make His light shine all the brighter.

And each stretch mark tells the story of hope and life. My porridge-like tummy was once home to my two favourite people – my kids.

They've left an indelible mark on my body and in my heart. It's a reminder of one of my greatest achievements – becoming a mum.

Words Matter

Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose. **Proverbs 18:21**

It happened in the shoe department. Casually browsing through the sandals, Tyson kneeling at my feet. He dropped a shoe, paused for a moment, then muttered: 'b@&&er.'

I was mortified. Where on earth did he learn...?

Oh.

Confession time... Amongst my many and varied flaws is a weakness for the odd expletive. Something that seemed harmless enough... until I heard that word come out of my 'epitome-of-innocence' 3 year old's mouth.

The other customers in the aisle chuckled. That didn't make me feel any better.

The words I want to speak into my children's lives are of faith, hope and love. To me, this was an epic parenting fail.

A wakeup call.

My children will speak out what I speak into them. So, I choose to speak life.

I still catch myself mid-expletive sometimes.

But my mantra has become: 'Speak life – Give encouragement wherever possible. Make sure your kids know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, how much you love them. Choose your words wisely when offering criticism.'

"The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."

— Peggy O'Mara

Our nightly ritual involves me and the boys climbing up to the top bunk in their room and snuggling together. We talk about all the things we're grateful for about the day and then Phil prays.

The boys' favourite part comes at the end when we all loudly declare at the top of our lungs: '... And everybody said AMEN!'

As I leave the room, I whisper: 'I love you.' Because I want those to be the last words they hear every day.

Live in the Moment

‘But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don’t work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards.’ **Matthew 7:27**

Absolute perfection. Blue sky, soft sand and inviting surf. Day 1 of our beach holiday and all is well with the world.

That was, until Tyson spotted the seemingly abandoned sandcastle. Front and centre, between the red & yellow flags on the busy foreshore.

Instinct took over and he did what any red blooded 3 and a half year old would have done... ran straight through the middle with complete, unadulterated excitement. Come on, what would you have done?

Then, from somewhere amongst the waves an angry figure appeared and made his way to the shore. He shook his head sternly at Tyson, and walked a few steps behind us to retrieve his shovel. Yes, this was a grown man with a shovel and a pick, recreating his dishevelled sandcastle with disdain.

His son soon appeared from the surf and joined in the mission.

Okay, to be fair, I overheard him explaining to someone that this was a perfect pyramid replica, built to scale.

But it was the middle of Summer... on a busy beach... right between the flags. What would you have done if your son had deconstructed this masterpiece?

We moved to the right of the flags and had a fabulous afternoon teaching the boys how to throw a Frisbee. Looking over my shoulder as our boys giggled and ran around in the sand, I saw the 'pyramid man' and his son standing guard. That's right... **STANDING GUARD** over their construction. I had to feel sorry for his son who looked like he'd much rather be riding his boogie board than protecting a sandcastle from toddlers and high tide.

A family nearby was constructing their own 'masterpiece,' laughing as turrets tumbled and the moat caved in. Now, *they* were having fun. Eventually, the tide came in and misshaped their work. They laughed, gave up and decided that was their cue to head home.

Tyson looked up at me with his heartwarming cheeky grin: 'That would be a great sandcastle to jump on.' His eyes twinkled. 'Come on,' I said and off we went. The wet sand was cool under our feet and I don't know why, but jumping on that sandcastle with Tyson laughing heartily beside me felt sooo good!

'Pyramid Man's' perfect pyramid was long gone by the morning but our memories will last forever.

Don't Keep Secrets

People brought babies to Jesus, hoping he might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they shooed them off. Jesus called them back. “Let these children alone. Don’t get between them and me. These children are the kingdom’s pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God’s kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you’ll never get in.” **Luke 18:15-17**

‘Shhhhh,’ I whispered. ‘Don’t spoil the surprise.’

‘Okay.’ Tyson whispered back, conspiratorially, as we tucked Phil’s Fathers Day present away in the storage room.

‘Remember, it’s our secret, okay? Don’t spoil the surprise.’ I continued, shutting the car door. Hearing his footsteps on the stairs before I even had time to turn around!

‘Don’t spoil the surprise, daddy!’ He called out, running as fast as his little legs would carry him.

‘Surprise?’ Phil asked, gathering Tyson into his arms.

‘Your Fathers Day present, daddy. It’s a new shirt!’ He squealed, jumping out of his skin with excitement

Okay, what part of ‘surprise’ does Tyson not understand?

For a moment I felt deflated. *So much for the surprise.* But then I couldn’t help but join in the laughter. The proverbial cat was out of the bag and Tyson couldn’t be happier.

There’s something so joyful and endearing about a child’s openness about absolutely everything. They have no secrets. No skeletons. No hidden agendas. And no doubt.

What you see is what you get.

Children express their every thought and emotion with reckless abandon. Every activity, conversation and bowel movement is retold, in vivid detail, as clearly as their limited vocabulary allows.

But then... along life's journey, we're taught that some things are better left unsaid, that secrets need to be locked away and emotions are to be felt but rarely expressed.

I'm not saying we should offer a running commentary of our lives but there's something so refreshing about pure, unadulterated honesty.

I aspire to be as honest as my kids.

Meander

God's glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.

Madame Day holds classes every morning, Professor Night lectures each evening.

Their words aren't heard, their voices aren't recorded,
But their silence fills the earth: unspoken truth is spoken everywhere.

God makes a huge dome for the sun—a superdome!
The morning sun's a new husband leaping from his honeymoon bed,
The daybreaking sun an athlete racing to the tape.

That's how God's Word vaults across the skies from sunrise to sunset, melting ice, scorching deserts, warming hearts to faith.

Psalms 19:1-6

A recent visit to our local park turned into a day of exploring a previously undiscovered (by us) bush track along the river, complete with swimming holes, waterfalls and a 'wibbly wobbly' bridge.

Once we started meandering, we just couldn't stop! We soon had to leave our pram wedged between bushes for this little 'off road' adventure. Our curiosity kept driving us forward, the kids wildly excited at every turn.

Rope swings over the river and standing barefoot in fresh water. The boys lost themselves in the simple pleasure of throwing stones into the shallows. The real world seemed a world away.

The highlight for Tyson was the discovery of the 'wibbly wobbly' bridge. He has talked about it ever since. Seriously.

2 hours later we emerged. Tired, yet full of life! The boys hadn't been bored for even a second and boy, did they sleep like little angels that night. It felt like we'd done something really important.

It's no surprise that countless studies show getting out amongst God's creation is good for our mind, body and soul. It's even been shown to improve behaviour in children – Amen to that!

Find Beauty in the Ordinary

A simple life in the Fear-of-God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches. **Proverbs 15:16**

Silly giggles, 3am feeds, bedtime cuddles, wiped tears and heart to hearts. These are the moments I'll treasure when my little ones are all grown up.

I reckon that if anyone ever does invent a time machine, it'll be a mother.

After all, wouldn't you give up everything you own to have one last snuggle with your little one, while they still think you're the most amazing person they know?

Recent studies have found that parents are spending an average of 4 hours a week less with their kids than a generation ago. But the time parents *do* spend with their kids is more focussed, like reading, playing and helping them learn – 'intensive parenting.'

But my kids don't need intense, spectacular or extraordinary. In fact, quite the opposite.

They treasure the time I spend with them, whether they're the focus or not. Why add to the stress of life by thinking you have to be 'all on, all the time' with your kids?

Amongst all the dirty nappies, tantrums, mud and mess, it's easy to forget these are the days you will treasure most.

Don't forget to cherish the gift of an ordinary day.

It has taken a while, but I certainly do know it now – the most wonderful gift I had, the gift I learned to cherish above all else, was the gift of all those perfectly ordinary days. – Katrina Kenison (The gift of an ordinary day)

Take Risks

Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. **Matthew 6:26**

The 'Helicopter Parent' inside me was screaming out to wrap my kids in cotton wool. And, to a certain extent, I think I was within my rights to feel that way – having spent time in the emergency ward with both my boys.

But I knew I had to let them fall every now and then so they could learn to pick themselves up, even though my mothering instinct is to run at full speed and catch them before they hit the ground.

One day, I won't be there to catch them and I need for them to know how to dust themselves off and keep going.

One day, it hit home... hard.

I took the boys to our local bike park. The oval is nice and flat and well within my comfort zone.

They cycled for a couple of laps and then, inevitably, they glanced longingly to the surrounding hills. The 'Mother Hen' in me wanted to keep them within the safety of the oval, with 'next to zero' chance of getting hurt but I knew they were ready for more.

So, we took the bikes over to a small ramp where they could practice their downhill racing. First, tentatively, with brakes on all the way down, then racing faster and faster as they did it over and over again. Then a dad arrived with his son, around 12 years old. He stood for a moment at the top of the hill, looked with disdain at the 'little' ramp we had just conquered and then unceremoniously shot forward toward the stairs. I literally grabbed my chest as he mounted the stairs and flew down them to the bottom. Breathing deeply, I looked to his dad, who smiled at him and muttered: 'Show off.'

I wanted to cry but instead I smiled at him and said: 'I guess I have that to look forward to.' He chuckled back, knowingly.

Sometimes, being a parent means denying your deepest instincts to protect and shelter your little ones, knowing that to fly, they must first fall out of the nest. There's much comfort in knowing that their Heavenly Father is holding them close, long after I let go.

I know that one day, they'll conquer mountains but for now, I'm happy watching them take on this little ramp with their training wheels.

Make Playtime a Priority

There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth. **Ecclesiastes 3:1**

Recently, I found myself hurtling down a hill, way too fast and out of control. It was terrifying, exhilarating and hilarious!

‘Do it again!’ Tyson yelled, laughing hysterically at the sight of his dishevelled mama, lying on the grass, regaining my composure after one pretty spectacular stack.

If you ask me how often I play with my kids, I’d have to hang my head and say: ‘not often enough.’

The truth is, far too often, they’ll ask me to set up train tracks, or race cars with them and my standard response is: ‘I just need to finish this and then I’ll join in.’ Only to move on to the next task, hoping they won’t notice.

I was checking email on my phone the other day when, out of nowhere, something swooped by at lightning speed and ripped it out of my hands. It happened so fast, I didn’t even see who it was.

Then I heard a familiar voice call out: ‘Mama, stop playing on your phone and play basketball with me!’ Tyson had pulled off the ultimate ball-stealing manoeuvre right under my nose and I didn’t even notice because I was too busy on Facebook!

There’s far too much to be done in 24 measly hours a day and playing with my kids has been de-prioritised as a result.

Only recently, Tyson was playing on my laptop, pretending to be daddy, when I heard him call out: ‘I’ve just got to finish this email, then we can play!’ I bet he’s heard that a million times.

But that day on the hill was different. I admitted defeat on my million-and-one 'to dos' and chose to straddle a bike that was waaay too small for me and just be silly with my boys. We had a ball! Pushing the bikes up the hill. Racing them down the hill. Ending up in a giggling heap at the bottom.

Lawrence Cohen, psychologist and author of "Playful Parenting" says playing with our children builds a specific kind of closeness, which fosters a real cooperative bond between parent and child.

Gotta get me some of that!

Dance Like No One's Watching

‘Oh yes, I’ll dance to God’s glory—more recklessly even than this.
And as far as I’m concerned . . . I’ll gladly look like a fool.’ **2**

Samuel 22

Saturday mornings in our house are a very relaxed affair. Our kids aren't involved in Saturday morning sports yet, so we'll usually snuggle together in bed and watch cartoons, before a leisurely breakfast.

The thrill of knowing there will be no conference calls or looming deadlines on Saturday is exhilarating.

On this particular morning, still in my pyjamas, I finished my last sip of coffee and casually flicked the TV over to the music channel..

'Let's dance!' I exclaimed. Arms and legs flailing about like a spectacularly uncoordinated octopus. My kids looked at me for a moment and then leapt to their feet.

We danced around the kitchen with reckless abandon; wriggling, jumping, clapping and laughing hysterically together.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of our neighbour sitting on his back deck, enjoying his own morning coffee, peering over in our general direction.

Instantly, I froze and then instinctively dropped to the floor, hand over mouth.

'What?!' My boys exclaimed. Suddenly very still and quiet, music still blaring in the background.

'Our neighbour's there.' I said. Breathless... How embarrassing!

Both boys stared at me, unblinking, waiting for the punchline.

Then it occurred to me that they had no idea what the matter was. We were having a great time. What had changed?

I'm sure they wouldn't have been entirely surprised if our neighbour had joined in and it hadn't even crossed their little minds to be embarrassed about having fun.

I knew it was silly. He had kids of his own and had probably pranced around his own kitchen making animal noises on more than one occasion.

So, when on life's journey do we learn to be embarrassed about simple pleasures? And why do we teach our kids to be embarrassed about simple pleasures, like dancing around the kitchen in our pyjamas?

I'd love to tell you that I picked myself up off that floor and kept right on dancing but I didn't. My self-conscious nature wouldn't let me. I crawled on hands and knees back into the lounge room and gingerly started moving around again, with half the zeal and enthusiasm of before. My kids looked on, puzzled, then quickly lost interest and went back to watching TV.

The moment was lost and I was so disappointed with myself.

I sent my neighbour a text message later on to apologise for exposing him to my awful dancing. He responded that he hadn't seen a thing, reminding me that our windows are tinted so he can't see in. 'And besides,' he said, 'we dance around our kitchen all the time.'

Oh.

Next time I'll remember to dance like no one's watching because, they probably aren't watching anyway, and even if they *are*, they're probably wishing they could join in.

Kindness Matters

When you're kind to others, you help yourself;
when you're cruel to others, you hurt yourself.' **Proverbs 11:17**

A pretty regular morning for me... running late. Heading out to a Play Group Leaders meeting, Jack wearing the last clean nappy and I hadn't had time to bake.

A last minute trip to the Grocery Store used to be a breeze... now I have children. I unbuckled them from their car seats with promises of chocolate milk if they were on their absolute best behaviour, then we raced in.

A young guy was out the front, collecting money for a charity; 'I literally have no money' I called over my shoulder... and I meant it. I had no money in my wallet. Thank goodness for credit cards.

The boys were true to their word... on their best behaviour.

Right.

Cupcakes – check

Muffins – check

Nappies – check

Chocolate milks – check

Ooh, that's a nice, new mascara. Just pop that in the basket.

The boys helped me load everything onto the counter in the busy express lane and the cashier was friendly as she processed it all.

'How would you like to pay for that?' she smiled.

'Credit....' I smiled back, opening my wallet, then staring at the empty space where my credit card should sit.

'Oh no no no no no no no no no!' I actually said out loud. 'No!' I'd left my credit card in my laptop bag after an interstate meeting 2 days earlier.

Tears of frustration pricked the back of my eyes.

'I'm so sorry, I've wasted your time,' I apologised to the cashier.
Aaaaaaargh.

'Can I open my chocolate milk now?' Tyson asked, hopefully.

'I'm so sorry, silly mama left my credit card at home.' I held back my tears.
Aaaargh!

Then, out of the 'express lane' crowd came a kind voice; 'I'll pay.'

Everyone turned around.

'I'll pay...' he said again, pulling cash from his wallet.

'Oh no, I couldn't,' I responded tearfully. Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry.

'How much is it?' He asked.

'Ah... \$39.60.'

'Well, I've got \$40 here.' He said. Handing it over.

The cashier started putting my groceries back into their bags, including the mascara.

I asked my elderly 'knight in shining armour' for his name and address.

'Lionel.' He said.

‘I’ll just leave my groceries here,’ he said to the cashier. ‘I’ve got to pop home and get some more cash.’

The magnitude of what had just happened overwhelmed me as we raced to the car.

Sitting in his car seat, sipping on his chocolate milk, Tyson paused thoughtfully and said; ‘that was really incredible what that man did, wasn’t it mum?’

‘It really was,’ I replied. ‘Incredible.’

Later that day I left the kids with Phil, put my credit card in its rightful place and stopped back at the grocery store to get some cash out and a box of chocolates. The least I could do, really.

As I pulled up in front of Lionel’s house, Christmas lights twinkling, he opened the front door and smiled. I hugged him and thanked him for the incredible lesson he taught my kids that morning.

‘Well,’ he responded gently, ‘If you can’t do a good deed on Christmas, when are you ever gonna do one?’

True.

A simple act of kindness and kindness can shape a mind and change a life.

Tyson may not always remember the kind man who paid for our groceries that hectic morning but there will always be something inside of him that remembers ‘kindness matters.’

Thank you, Lionel.

Stop and Smell the Wild Flowers

When Attention, all! See the marvels of God! He plants flowers and trees all over the earth... “Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at me, your High God, above politics, above everything.” **Psalm 46:8-10**

It was no time for humour, but that didn't stop my obstetrician. No, it did not. As I gasped and groaned in the midst of labour, he leaned over to the nurse and said: 'this is the one who doesn't like exercise.' Then he grinned at me and said 'I bet you're regretting it now... giving birth is hard work!'

I was too exhausted to yell at him and also, I knew he was right. But when does a busy working mum fit in exercise?

Having gained nearly 30 kilos during my child-bearing season, I decided it was time to get back into shape. Running around after 2 toddlers is tiring, especially if you're unfit.

So, one afternoon I pulled out my dusty runners, checked them for cobwebs and decided to go for a jog.

'I'll be back in half an hour,' I called out. And instantly, two pairs of feet came running down the hallway.

'Can we come too?' Tyson squealed, excitedly. My shoulders slumped.

'Mummy just needs some time out... to exercise.'

'Please, mummy?' He begged.

Sigh. So, I got out the two seater pram and they climbed in. I started to think it might actually be a good idea – giving my arms a good work-out, as well as my legs. That is, until we got about 2 metres from our house and Tyson yelled out: 'Stop mummy!' with so much passion I was sure I'd run over a small child. Hastily, he jumped out of the pram and declared 'Look mum, a stick!'

Sigh. He clambered back into the pram and I took a few more steps. I hadn't even hit my stride yet when Jack yelled out: 'I need a stick too, mummy! Slow down!'

Sigh. So, I slowed down to just above crawling speed as we scoured the footpath until we found a decent sized stick.

Right. Off we go then. We actually travelled a good 25 metres before Tyson yelled out again 'Stop!'

Okay, I was starting to lose my patience. How's a girl supposed to get her heart rate up with all this stopping? 'What is it now?' I said... more like sighed, really.

As I turned to see what all the fuss was about, Tyson smiled sweetly: 'for you, mummy,' holding up a little bunch of wild flowers. How had I never noticed them before?' I suppose I'd never really *stopped* to notice them before.

In that moment, my heart pumping work out turned into a treasure hunt. My boys took me on a guided tour of 'hidden treasures' in our neighbourhood. They knew where all the wild flowers were and I'd never even noticed them.

That still counts as a work out, right?

Make Friends, Not Judgements

Overlook an offence and bond a friendship; fasten on to a slight and—good-bye, friend! **Proverbs 17:9**

A week of rain had taken its toll. Like two caged lions, my boys were bored. Bored. Bored. Bored. We had done every indoor activity I could think of... twice... and I couldn't handle one more 'Peppa Pig' marathon and so we made our way to every parent's last bastion of wet weather sanity... an indoor play centre.

The boys could barely sit still long enough for me to take off their shoes, their excitement was uncontainable.

Off they went, at full speed, dive bombing into the ball pit and I sat, sipping coffee, face down in my smart phone. It was a welcome reprieve from the overly familiar walls at home and I knew I'd get a good couple of hours' peace.

That is, until the moment I looked up from my phone to make sure they hadn't escaped. There they were, happily building a tower together out of foam blocks. Giggling and building. Perfect. Then, another little boy appeared on the scene and watched, considering his next move. Before I could put my coffee down, he'd pounced. Right into the middle of the tower, laughing manically as it tumbled. Then he stood amongst the ruins. Triumphant. I was furious! 'Where is his mother?' I thought, looking around, ready to give her 'the look.'

But when I looked back, expecting to see my boys running towards me in tears, I was genuinely shocked. They were all laughing hysterically together.

'Let's do it again!' Tyson declared. Already stacking more pieces, one on top of the other. The other little boy joined in. Then it was Jack's turn to topple the tower. More hysterical laughter and more rebuilding.

Eventually, the boys came bounding over for a quick drink. 'You're having fun.' I smiled. 'What's your new friend's name?'

'I don't know,' Tyson replied, breathlessly, before returning to his new friend for another tower crashing session.

I love it how kids are so ready to embrace a new friendship, without worrying about the details.

How differently the afternoon would have turned out had they reacted the way I felt! Thank goodness for these little people who remind me not to take life so seriously and to see every disaster as an opportunity to rebuild and have some fun along the way.

After the Storm

When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth. **Genesis 9:12-16**

It was the first of the summer storms and it was ferocious! We watched on from the safety of our lounge room as outdoor furniture flew across the deck and rain belted the windows. We had to shout to hear each other.

The first crack of thunder nearly made us jump out of our collective skin. It was deafening and Tyson looked at me, uncertain.

‘It’s okay, sweetie. It’s just the clouds talking to each other.’ I smiled and rubbed his arm, assuredly.

He leaned into me just the same and I comforted him as the storm raged. He remained very quiet.

As always with our summer storms, as quickly as it rolled in, it blew over and the rain subsided.

As the last raindrops fell, we jumped in the car and headed out to the grocery store.

We got to the end of our street and there it was... a breathtaking rainbow. So bright and colourful against the backdrop of storm clouds. Tyson peered out excitedly and declared: ‘Look mama! God put a rainbow in the sky!’

'Yes He did!' I smiled.

As we drove a little further and turned another corner, Tyson looked out again and said: 'Hey mama, that rainbow's following us, just like God does!'

I have to admit, I had never thought about it that way. Every time I see a rainbow, I think of it as a reminder of God's love and faithfulness but maybe He left another message for us in the rainbow.

As we drove along, I noticed that every time we turned a corner, the rainbow was, indeed, following us.

Just. Like. God. Does.

Epilogue

‘Children grow families.’

Murray Averill

Over the past few years, we’ve watched our boys grow from tiny infants, to hyperactive toddlers... we’ve farewelled nappies, 3am feeds and first steps, welcoming a new season of growth and development as they explore and discover the world around them.

And as parents, we’ve watched each other grow from sleep deprived clueless ‘newbies,’ to fully embracing this crazy season of our lives together. Our children have taught us so much about life and love and faith... about ourselves and about each other.

We are forever grateful for the gift of parenthood.

About the Author

My name's Annette and on July 29th, 2010, after working in Media & Advertising for over 10 years, I finally landed my dream job – motherhood!

Now I have 2 gorgeous boys, Tyson (born 29th July, 2010) & Jack (born 22nd February, 2012) and along with my husband, I run a boutique advertising agency called Blue Box Media.

Now, I balance 5am cuddles with 5pm deadlines. I make cold calls and packed lunches. And I do business while cleaning up 'business' – the ultimate multi-tasker.

I don't have it all together... au contraire! But what would be the fun in that, anyway?

Amongst all the tears and tantrums (sometimes my own), the busyness and messiness, it's a great honour and privilege to be a mum.





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