

Introduction: Parenting Writes Me

I fell in love with *The Children*, again, after marathon nursing, rescuing plastic geese from diaper pails, recycling horrible beads for dress-up, and creating the hundredth tale about Sunnyvale, California. Missy Younger's fascination with carpet lint, Dude's constant testing of our cars' locks and Missy Older's experimentation with toilet paper ornaments slowly made sense in *expose'*; parenting writes me.

By constructing pages of prose, I've learned to express why party dresses mix well with snow, why flooded kitchens entreat celebration, and why gummy smiles linger far longer than do the happy expressions formed by teeth-filled mouths. Neither my postgraduate degrees nor my martial arts training provided insights anywhere as poignant as those I glean by scrapbooking my children's wisdoms. My words, necessarily, witness my life as lived among little ones.

Consider, for example, that when our large, ordinarily vegetarian, pink fabric dinosaur looked hungrily at our plastic sheep, I knew my limited facilities would have to stretch to relate to my offspring. While that primitive, cloth creature stared wistfully at our flock of malleable innocents, I began to conjure, in my mind, a poem about power. Whereas, later, I was thrilled that my work was accepted by a respectable publication, I was that much more elated that putting my parenting experience into verse gave me some clarity as to what my preschoolers might have been thinking.

My children held as true and correct that kneelides are the way to transverse vast swathes of lawn and that toppling cities is the most fun that can be had with interlocking building blocks.

When I composed an essay on those matters, I began to realize that play, among other things, is about prerogative.

Some mornings, Dude and Missy Older, simultaneously, insisted on filling and on pushing Missy Younger's buggy. On such occasions, I smiled, nodded, and ran to catch our youngest before she went flying. During other times, such as when Missy Younger fell betwixt our couch and ottoman, I got mentally busy sprinting between amusement and guilt.

Afterward, I learned that Missy Older had intentionally moved her sister's pillow, the one which had blocked Missy Younger from slipping, so that Missy Older could see my facial reaction. Missy Older wanted me to notice her; she was not content to wait until I finished another potty training episode with Dude. In the end, I used that incident, and the one in which the two big kids took our perambulator around the block without accompaniment from me, as the backstory for a play.

Sometimes life's carnival bored Dude. In one instance, our fascinating-to-assemble peanut butter-and-sunflower seed-covered pinecones, which we offered up to wintertime backyard birds, held none of his interest because he was otherwise occupied with practicing throwing up. He had noticed that Missy Older, when ill with the flu, had received lots of attention. I processed his monkey business into a short story about a harried mother.

I also composed a longer piece that reflected just how creative Missy Older had gotten. Case in point, she'd learned to remove her car seat from our sedan and to lock our cats into that contraption. Once she'd trapped a furry victim within, she'd bellow, repeatedly, "He's stuck." I was able to smile at her behavior and to translate her deeds into an essay on living with preschoolers.

The children, hopefully, will continue to act childish. I, hopefully, will continue to write about them.