

Please Excuse Me, Mommy's having a Moment



Excuses Explanations for My Mommy Moments

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IF I CAN BE PERFECTLY HONEST

I am going through a period of self-discovery in which I have decided that honesty is the best and only policy. I feel like this is the path I must travel if I am ever to become the person that I want to be. In addition, I find it ironically accurate that the only way you can get to know the real me is to find out who I am not. Let's begin, shall we?

1. I desperately want to be the type of woman who keeps her house immaculately clean, just not enough to actually do it. My counters are cluttered, and there are dark spots on the kitchen floor. Everywhere I look is some mess I want to clean...but don't.

2. I am not supermom. I'm not even averagemom. No kidding, while writing this, I just asked the crying baby, "What the blankity-slips do you want from me?" Just said that. And I'm not writing in code words for profanity—I just said that sentence, as written, because these kids are driving me out of my mind.

3. No matter how many low-calorie or healthy food items I stock in my kitchen, I can always find a way to make an unwise selection. And if there is nothing on hand, I will bake it. I will scour the Internet for as long as it takes to find a no-flour, or no-sugar, or no-butter recipe to make some

dessert that will fit whatever healthy ingredients I have on hand. And then I will eat the whole thing.

I've been reflecting on the person I want to be—a woman that has a great body, clean home and smart, well-behaved children, but I try really hard and fall very short. Okay, here's another truth—it's not like I'm trying as hard as I can. That would be a lie. I know this because every time my husband makes one of those “what *do* you do all day” comments I am able to revenge-clean the entire house and make a stunning meal before he gets home from work for at least two consecutive days. But then by day three, everything is back to normal.

And I'm not saying this to get a bunch of nice compliments of what a great job I am doing. In fact, compliments are part of the problem. My good friend, Joy, says I need to learn how to take a compliment, but really my problem is accepting a compliment that isn't deserved. Like, if I spend two hours trying to shape what has become a bird's nest on my head and she says “I love what you've done to your hair!” I'm gonna roll my eyes. And when someone says, “You are in such great shape—I' don't know how you do it,” while just that morning my support underwear yelled “Hey, sister—lay off the donuts!” I'm just going to shrug my shoulders and laugh it off. And when I get, “You are the best mom in the world!” after just having

a mommy meltdown where I momentarily lost vision in my left eye, I'm going to say, "Oh, stop!" Please.

While, admittedly, I don't try hard enough, I do try in chunks. I am always looking for a routine that will allow me to have time to write and cook and clean and work out and occasionally go to the bathroom without parking my kids in front of the TV or iPad for hours. I haven't found that solution yet, but I am still searching for that balance. It's not as easy as duplicating the days when everything gets done, because those days are just too much work. Those are the days when I work non-stop from dawn until after midnight, never sitting, never resting. And while those days are great for my house, or my kids, or my husband, and I feel really accomplished at night, I just can't imagine going at that pace every day.

I just keep working at it and hope I'll figure it all out one step at a time. To be honest, as that *is* the goal, the compliments actually do help. I guess it kind of keeps me accountable when I'm in the heat of the moment. For example, I will remember someone saying, "I wish I had your metabolism," and I will close the bag of chips. Turns out you *can* eat just one. Or I will remember someone saying, "How do you keep your house so clean?" and clean up the spilled gunk in the fridge right after it happens instead of leaving it to gel for two days. And when I find the baby knocking over cans

in the pantry with a wet toilet brush, I remember how my friend called me “supermom” and calmly remind the boys not to unlock the baby lock on the bathroom door. And the pantry door. And then I clean the toilet water off my canned food without throwing any of the children. No, not the cans, the actual children. I would never throw cans at my children—what do you think I am, a monster?

So, here’s what we’ve learned so far. I am far from perfect. But you probably could have guessed that. And, I will allow you to give me compliments, though I may not accept them gracefully. And, who am I kidding, where’s the bag of chips? Umm, that’s enough truth for today. Now it’s time for the lies. Or as I like to consider them, excuses...ahem, explanations for my mom moments.

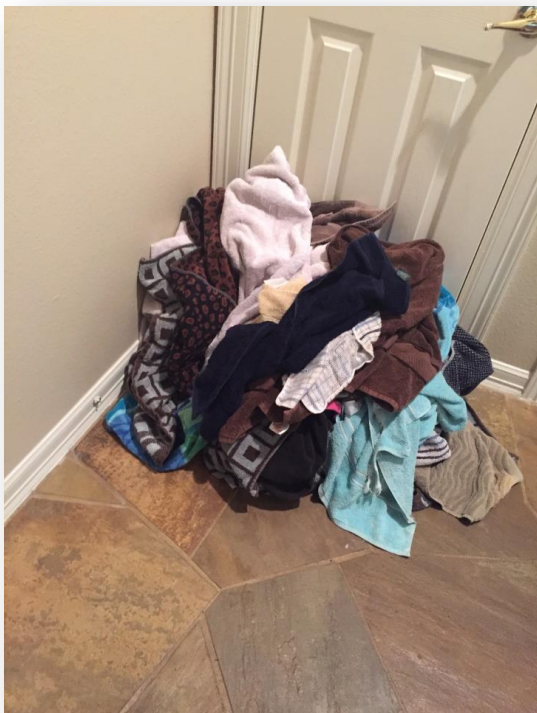
EXCUSING MY MOMMY MOMENTS

For every person wanting to give me a compliment, there are three more (I'm in denial, there are more than three) who give me those judgy looks and make those judgy comments. Is judgy a word? I'm sure it is a word. So for those judgy people, I would like to take a moment to explain my methods. These provide an outline for the way my house is run, and quite frankly, I believe these will enlighten you to a new approach to motherhood. Buckle up, people. I'm about to drop some knowledge.

- The food in the bottom of the highchair seat is called "appetizers".
- The hardened French fries in the car seat are baby toys. You've heard of the "don't text and drive campaign." This is part of the "don't rummage through your purse for baby snacks and entertainment and drive" movement. It's about safety.
- The underwear in my son's pant leg was actually strategically placed there in case he has an accident at school.
- Old bottles of milk under the couch are part of a cooking experiment. We are trying new recipes to make our own butter and cheeses. I would imagine you need a cool, dark place to accomplish this.

Exactly.

- The lower windows on the doors of the home office are intentionally smudged and “dirty”. It is so I can work in there with the lights off and the children won’t be able to see me through the glass.
- I don’t lock the bathroom door to get away from my children.
Heavens no. I lock it so I can hear them pounding on the door while I’m in there so I know where they are and that they are safe.
- The hairpins, thumbtacks and batteries are in the couch cushions because, obviously, this is the last place the kids look. I suppose you keep those types of objects in high places? Well, my kids hurt themselves falling off of chairs trying to reach dangerous objects in high places.



- I leave clean laundry in a pile on the floor for at least 24 hours because I read somewhere that this allows the fabric to breathe. You’ve heard of sitting a bottle of wine uncorked on the counter, or letting meat rest after cooking? Same thing.

- Baby locks? We don't use baby locks on cabinets anymore. They use those as weapons.
- Yes, sometimes I have been known to let the baby eat off the floor. It builds up his immunity and does wonders for his skin, hair and nails.
- The bed *was* made earlier this morning. But later, the boys were practicing their emergency preparedness on and under the bed. Better safe than sorry.
- Yes, I do recycle and care deeply about our environment, but I need those Walmart bags to dispose of nose-peeling diapers every day. I believe the containment of those poisonous fumes is some of the best work I do in my community.
- I'll admit, I do sit my children in front of the television from time to time. And they're better for it. SpongeBob is a thinly veiled tribute to the diversity of sea life. Dora is a celebration of friendship and homage to the reality of the bilingual childhood explorer. Frozen is an eye-opening lesson on the effects of global climate change. My only concern is, are a couple of hours a day truly enough?

- You call it bribery. I call it positive reinforcement behavior training.
 - PS—when you use mint-flavored, sugar-free candy, it is in fact *not* bad for their teeth, and it soothes minor tummy discomfort while freshening breath.
- They aren't "fighting." They are exploring the limitlessness of brotherhood in a physical way.
- We have a strict "only one person allowed to sleep at a time" rule in this household, and my husband, as the head of the family, gets first dibs.
- When you see me ignoring a screaming child in public, understand that I am on the 12th step of a scientifically-proven 13 step discipline process. I assure you that I *do* hear it, and I *am* dealing with it in the most effective manner possible. The thirteenth step? Leave the child at your house. That's right, fix your face, and back away.
- That is not soap scum on my shower door. It is a homemade "faux frosted" glass décor.
- I know the dog bowl is empty. But if he fills up on dog food he won't have room for all the scraps under the table.

- His shoes are on the wrong feet because I believe that teaching my children independence and self-care is more important than “fashion”. Or practicality. Or blisters.
- He is out in public with only one shoe because it part of this really cool game called the “Lose one shoe while out on various errands, then go back over all the places you’ve already been to find said shoe” scavenger hunt. This game is really fun if you have a good sense of humor and are not prone to violent outbursts.
- I am not a bad driver—considering the circus performance occurring inside the car, I’m actually quite skilled.
- I am not taking the Lord’s name in vain. Those are real, necessary calls for help from my Lord and Savior.

Don’t judge me.

MEET THE FAMILY

Now that you know a little about me and how I run my household, let me introduce you to the family.



My oldest son is William. He's the one who changed my life twice—first by being the first child and the one who made me a mother. Second, by being diagnosed with Down syndrome when he was five days old. He continues to amaze me. He is sensitive and kind, and frustrating and beautiful, much like every child ever born. William is our engineer. He is the first to discover how everything works in our house. Mainly, because he just took it apart. He pushes every button and pulls every lever and figures stuff out by the process of trial and error. He was the first one to

figure out how to defeat all of the baby locks and gates, the first to use the iPad, the first to successfully play a DVD.

Ironically, how the one with Down syndrome is the one who is the inventor, the inquisitor. But in fact it is his Down syndrome that has afforded him this wonderful talent. If a “typical” person approaches a closed door with an able-bodied person standing outside of it, waiting, they will usually assume the door is locked. Let us take it one step farther, imagine the person waiting says expressly, “the door is locked,” or there is a sign to that effect posted on the door. Other people will wait as well, an entire group will form, all waiting for someone to come and let them in. Someone like William will walk right up and try the door. Not because he isn’t smart enough to realize that it is locked, but because he just wants to see it for himself. Where typical, “normal” people will wait on one side of an obstacle, William will attempt to overcome it. The ability to become jaded by previous experience, the finality of being told an answer does not compute with him. He always has to try something with his own hands. He is quick to forgive, and always gives second chances. He knows right from wrong, but he doesn’t let that define his every action. It is really a wonderful set of qualities.

My Sean is our fearless leader. To the boys, he is SuperSean, the brother that gets them into and out of trouble with his quick wit and silver tongue. Oh, and he's really bossy, so there's that. Before having Sean and getting to know his individual personality, I always worried that he would be the one to get what I call "Second Child syndrome." Being in the middle is classically difficult, but what added pressures will he endure being in the shadow of someone who is "special?" I can't yet be sure, but I know one thing, Sean is no stranger to demanding the attention he deserves. He is also really altruistic and kind, good qualities for any leader to possess. I am sure he will continue to be the mouthpiece, the frontman, the protector, the administrator, the big brother they all need throughout their lives.

If Sean is the brains, Dillon is the brawn. Sometimes they butt heads for leadership, while at other times they fall perfectly in line. But where Sean talks, Dillon is quiet, and when Sean negotiates, Dillon demonstrates. He is the one who climbs the pantry to get the snacks. The one who will punch you in the face during a play fight. The one who says most often, "Mommy, watch this." I don't understand how he does it sometimes. There are times they will all be sitting at the table eating cereal and out of the corner of my eye I will see Dillon fall to the ground as if he is dropping from

the ceiling. He's a stuntman, a sports star, a breathless, red-cheeked, non-stop ball of energy.

Finally, there is Austin. He is deliciously edible and sweet, though he has a bit of salty and sour flavor to him as well. I don't know which contributing factor to his spoiling is worse—is it the fact that he is the baby and can do no wrong? Is it how incredibly beautiful and smart he is (which makes him very good at getting what he wants)? I'd hate to think it was the circumstance under which he was born. Our beloved fourth child was conceived while we were still trying to decide if we even wanted another child. So, though I was on the affirmative side of that debate, his timing was still largely “unplanned.” All of the extended family was hopeful he would be the first girl, but alas, everyone but me and my husband were greatly disappointed when his little penis appeared on the screen. We really were looking forward to having four boys, and my husband picked the name before we found out the gender. He called me and said, “Let's name the baby Austin, whether it's a boy or a girl!” And I instantly loved the name and knew we would use it—mostly because my husband never comes up with names so this was a momentous occasion.

LAUGHING THROUGH TEARS

Speaking of names, after my mother vetoed my first choice for Dillon (it was Henry, by the way), I decided I would NEVER tell ANYONE my name choice again. She and I did discuss the middle names, as we always use one beginning with Ch. She liked Champ, but I knew Willie wouldn't agree. So Austin Chase it was. Then, two weeks before my due date, my mother went in for a bronchoscopy. She had a lung transplant in 2000 and has to get this procedure at least once a year to monitor the health of her lungs. She always got super scared before going under and we usually all downplay it so she can get through it. But that morning, for some reason, I changed my mind. When she called, I could tell her voice was strained and she was already trying to find excuses to panic. I opened my mouth to tell her to chill out, but instead what came out was, "Just don't do it."

"What? What do you mean, don't do it?" She was surprised as I was at this sudden advice. "I have to. I'm scheduled in a few minutes."

"Tell the nurse that you aren't feeling up to it and they can do it tomorrow. What's it going to hurt to do it tomorrow?" She considered this.

“Okay, I’ll talk to her.” She didn’t sound sure.

“Do you want me to talk to her?”

“No. I’ll do it.”

“Okay, well, just talk to her and call me back and tell me what she says. If she gives you a hard time, I’ll call myself.”

“Okay.”

“Are you going to call me back?”

“Yes.”

That was the last word she ever said to me. She never spoke to the nurse. She never called me back. She went through with the procedure, and they accidentally punctured her lung in the recovery room while removing the tube. Her chest cavity filled with air, causing her heart to stop for around 5 minutes. She had at least two strokes. The doctors were pointedly vague and very hopeful that her condition would improve. They kept her on machines for a month.

So, my baby was born while my mother was in this state of flux. And before he turned two weeks old, I had to fly with him back to Indiana to shut off the machine that was keeping my mother alive. She never got to hear that the baby was named Austin Champ.

Funny thing, too, even though my mother swore all of my children look like her, this last one actually kinda does. So now, I *might* spoil him just a little bit. But that doesn't mean that he's my favorite. I am pretty certain that any day now, he will morph into a toddler terror like his brothers before him. And he has all the makings of becoming the King Terror. Of that I am very aware.

You'll find that I might be in a mini-denial about certain things, but it is a very self-aware denial. Much like lucid dreaming, where you know you are dreaming, but you don't wake up. I can't explain it, I'm not a scientist. See—I am very forthcoming about my own shortcomings. I can tell you how it is, and how it is not, even if I do not operate under the stated rules. I think this will help you get to know me a little better. These are the foundations upon which I am built, the denial, the excuses, the children. And now, grief—though it doesn't complete me—permeates a lot of my frame of mind. I originally started writing to get it out—to vent all of the stories that I used to tell my mom at the end of the day. Even while sweating profusely in a public toilet stall, holding one child above the contaminated seat while trying to keep the other from splashing us with the toilet water and a baby attached to my chest, crying directly in my face—I knew that I would tell my mother that story that very evening and we would

cry from laughing. I would think about it even then, trying to remember every detail so she could really feel my pain in that moment, and the reward would be much greater.

I need this. I need to get this out. Because if I don't, it isn't funny. If I don't laugh about it at some point— or have the hope that I *will* laugh at some point, well then I'm just wearing children, getting splashed with crap water at Walmart. If that isn't funny, then it is very, very sad.

I'VE CHANGED

My goals used to be different. I had goals to guide my future in general, and for my career. At work, I would have weekly and even daily goals. The achievement of which gave me a sense of satisfaction and kept me on the path to where I one day wanted to find myself. As a stay-at-home mother, I only have one goal--to sit down. Seriously. No joke. I finally realized that the overwhelming need, desire, *ache*, to sit my tired behind on a chair is the sole determining factor in the decisions I make on a daily basis.

I am constantly in a state of motion, and I am constantly interrupted. It's like some variation on Murphy's Law called Mommy's Law—any action that can be interrupted, *will be interrupted*. I initially thought that my memory was starting to fade. I would catch myself forgetting all the time. Sitting at a blank computer screen—fingers hovering above the keys but not knowing what I intended to type in the Google box. Standing in front of the pantry door, staring into the fridge or freezer, shuffling aimlessly through the contents of my purse, with no vague notion of what my goal was. As if I had just reentered my own body after fleeing the abduction of an alien race, my consciousness dropped back into my flesh and found me

blinking into the junk drawer searching desperately for the reason I'd opened it in the first place.

But my memory isn't failing. And I've never been abducted by aliens—at least, not that I know of—I've been abducted by the all-encompassing needs, wants and every fleeting desire of my children. And just like Netflix—Mommy is on demand. Remember how I mentioned my stretch goal is to sit down? It's true. Every time I attempt to sit—whether with the intention to read, relax, eat, or even on the...ahem, throne, I am stopped mid-sit. I've begun to tell myself that at least the moments my booty spends hovering over a chair in anticipation before being whisked away to attend to a child in need are good for my glutes. A sort of mommy-squats circuit training.

When they say the grass is always greener, they are right. I don't even know who "they" are—but they accurately captured my very sentiment in one precise little adage. Because when I worked in the corporate office, I dreamed about the life I was sacrificing for my kids. I stressed over the time I didn't spend, the lessons I didn't teach, the meals I didn't make. I just knew that if I were to stay at home, my kids would be smarter, healthier, better behaved. And my house? Cleaner. More joyful. An all-around oasis. My body? Don't get me started on my body! It would truly

be a temple—tight, fit, healthy, and clothed in only the trendiest of fashion. My marriage? Couples in therapy would read about my marriage in their workbooks of *“Marriages to Aspire to—but Won’t Actually Achieve Unless One Person Stays Home and Makes the Magic Real.”* That, of course, is just the working title. But the content is real, and it is life-changing.

When my husband’s job moved us from Ohio to Texas, I was just beginning my third maternity leave. I was filled with the excitement of starting over in a new city, and knew this was my opportunity to stay at home with the safety net of getting a job later if it didn’t work out. But even if it was a stretch financially, our healthy, well-behaved, genius children would be well worth the cost. So, when I finally found myself on the lush, green turf of stay-at-home-mommy life, I did what any corporate-office, stress-driven, no-patience, brown-thumbed mommy would do—I trampled it down into a bare patch of brown earth, dotted with little wild, beautiful blooms of misplaced love and good intentions. And now, as I examine my little dirt garden, I realize I need to reflect on my direction. I need to call upon my industry experience of how to evaluate the return of investment on an ongoing campaign to decide upon a course of action. My research has uncovered a few revelations.

REVELATIONS

Revelation #1: I need to lower my standards.

When cleaning the kitchen, with the intent to teach my children responsibility (and the hidden motivation of one day ridding myself of this task) I ask the boys to help me. It is always an exercise in self-constraint. One will push the plastic containers around the counter with the dirty broom brush, two others will haphazardly wipe food onto the floor, and the baby loves to sit on the open door of the dishwasher, drinking cups of dirty water and licking knives. So you know, after like 45 seconds of this I've had enough and I send them all out of the kitchen.

One day, my husband of all people introduced me to an exciting phenomenon. He had volunteered (and by that I mean, he was volun-told) to clean the kitchen and he was at that stage in all of his cleaning projects where the object to be cleaned is *way* dirtier than it began, and he said, "Boys, come and help me with the dishes." And lickity-split, four boys (yes, the baby too) come filing in and open the dishwasher and begin to empty it onto the counter. They helped each other check plates for leftover spots and food and would make "clean" and "dirty" piles. They stacked plates that were the same size and color, and cups, and plastic containers, and

lined them all up. Then, my husband put the stacks away while they all cleaned the table and counters.

I was really surprised. Mind you, I found more than a few dirty plates and spotty glasses in the cupboards the next morning. And the highchair had sticky juice dried on it. And there was a fork with an entire bite of food waiting in the drawer. And the floors...oh, the floors. BUT, their teamwork and overall achievement at this task was far greater than any time *I've* ever supervised. Because I always reach my limit at some point, and feel, okay—that's enough cleaning for now, and swoop in and finish the job to my liking. I had assumed that me showing them how to do it, and then giving them a few minutes to practice going through the motions would be enough, over time, for them to learn how to do it right. But watching them with my husband, I realized that for them to truly learn how to do it, I have to let go and let them make a mess. This might result in a dirty dish in the cabinet, or a broken glass or two (or three), but I have to calm down and let it happen.

And they were so happy. When I “help” them clean, we are all frustrated—they whine, or lose focus, or fight over the broom. When my husband helped them, they were all, “Ooh, your glass is really clean,” and “here, let me help you with that plate,” and “Thank you, Daddy for letting us

clean.” That’s right. My husband is a genius. Because the one time he cleans the kitchen he, A) doesn’t actually do all of the work, B) leaves the kitchen with items still needing to be cleaned later, and C) gets genuinely thanked for his service. I can’t pull off one of those, much less all three.

So, even though I’ve always known that I’m wound a little too tight, I have just one more reason to loosen up. With a task as simple as doing the dishes, I can teach my babies how to become responsible little boys, and I can live a much happier existence. And that is not an over exaggeration—I once totaled the time I used to spend washing dishes after every meal and realized that on some days, I spend more time standing in one spot in the kitchen than I do sleeping in bed. But then again, I sleep way less than the average person. Which leads me to...

Revelation #2: I need to sleep more

Which isn’t likely to happen for at least a few years. A glimpse into my world, if you will. If I were ever on a reality show, the best time for taping would be around 3:00 PM when all the kids are home and throughout the night until 7:45 AM the next morning when they are out of the house. This is when all of the magic happens—and I don’t mean in the bedroom.

When the kids I've missed so dearly all fill the home once more, with their stories, and fighting, and begging and eating—this is when my real job begins. It is a constant parade of activity and noise and feeding and wiping and refereeing until finally they are all tucked into bed. But, wait, my work doesn't end there. The night time is a blur of shenanigans that only a mother can truly appreciate. I only say that because my husband sleeps right through this entire part of our life. Like a sane person.

Dillon always takes a nap during the day, so he can be fresh and alert until past 11 EVERY NIGHT. So he usually is in bed with us, watching TV thus forcing us to turn off whatever we've saved all week on the DVR and turn on *Teen Titans, Go!* Which, admittedly he probably shouldn't be watching either but it's called compromise, people.

Once he's asleep, I spend an hour or so doing whatever administrative household-type work that can be done from my phone—paying bills, answering emails, looking up schedules for basketball— and folding laundry. Sometime between 12-2 Sean usually wakes up—sometimes he needs to go to the bathroom, sometimes he is itchy from eczema, other times he just wants to tell me he doesn't like it when it's quiet, or his brothers are touching him. Something like that. Admittedly, this doesn't happen every night—just 2-3 times a week.

The baby typically wakes sometime between 2-4, crying for an “eebaba” which we have gathered to mean he wants to eat a bottle, so I prepare him one and put him in my bed before he wakes the others. He drinks the whole thing and soaks through his diaper onto my clothes, so I have to get up and change him, me, the sheets...

William wakes up between 4-5 every morning. We tried putting him to bed later but he is just an early riser. He would get up and make all kinds of noise until everyone in the house is awake hours before they need to be. A few times he gets up and wanders around the house quietly—usually putting on the television downstairs and generally minding his own business. Or, at least that’s what I *thought* he was doing.

It started when I noticed random lights or fans on in rooms no one had been in, or things generally out of place. One day, I found an eaten fried chicken wing under his bed, so I figured he must have brought up a snack. Then I found an empty soda can on the floor of the baby’s room. I put the baby in his crib and I feel all these rocky little crumbs everywhere. I turn on the light and the baby’s crib is full of fried chicken bits. I guess at some point during his red-eye morning activities, William must have climbed into the baby’s crib and ate chicken and a soda? I ran down to my husband, hands full of chicken crumbs and asked him, “You think William

brought chicken and soda up to the baby's room this morning?" He looked at me like *I'm* crazy.

"I doubt that's what happened," he said, like he's the voice of reason.

"Okay, then we have a strange person hiding in our house eating Popeye's in the baby's crib."

There is no real conclusion to this story. I just wanted to let anyone who may be considering me for a reality show know the best time to send over the camera crew, for their scheduling convenience. Because, for me, this is a 24-hour party. Which leads me to my next topic...

Revelation #3: I need to get on a schedule

My husband is in favor of me staying home with the boys. He knows I would like to go back to work, but he really wants me to focus on the positives of staying home while I have the chance. Of course, he is right, and I am truly grateful for having the opportunity, even though I personally find that for me staying home is *much* more difficult than working. He is always trying to give me helpful advice on how to keep pushing forward, although sometimes I find he is a little out of touch with the reality of daily life in our home. That is completely my fault—I haven't really allowed him to experience the full chaos that is our life. Unfortunately for me, this

results in him not fully understanding why the house isn't cleaner, or why more of these children can't use the toilet.

He called me from work one morning and said he knew how difficult things had been, and how the summer break was really hard on me with all the boys home from school. I thought he was going to suggest I take the weekend to myself, or go get a massage or something. But no, he suggested I make a schedule for the boys to solve my problems.

"For example," he suggested, "you could write down, eat from 8 – 8:30, and then you could take them to the zoo or do your own little field trips." I didn't speak, so he continued. "Then you could have a mandatory nap time, then play outside. If you teach them the schedule, they know they have to do it, and if they do, I can reward them when I get home."

I love this for so many reasons. First, the idea of a schedule—that's new. The idea of consistency in the home is just the kind of trendy, new-age thinking we need around here. Second, field trips to the zoo—awesome idea! Of course, I almost stood in front of traffic after a 20 minute trip to Target, but no worries. I'm sure I could handle something as easy as a zoo trip with all four of the children by myself, so long as I don't let my cape get too close to the gorilla cages. Third, nap time. Now that sounds refreshing. At some point in the day, we should all just lie down and sleep.

And finally, after this great day, Daddy can come home and reward them. I guess it's like one of those good cop/bad cop type of deals. Perfect!

Now all I need to carry out this plan is a large poster board, some markers and some of those shiny star stickers, at least one nanny, some magic sleep dust (or horse tranquilizers could work in a pinch) and a giant bottle of wine (for me, not the kids). But I'm still recovering from our trip to Target yesterday, so forgive me if I start tomorrow. PS: does anyone know if Target even carries magic sleep dust/tranquilizers? Because if I could get everything in one trip, that would be ideal.

Revelation #4: I need to be less random

I once read a cute piece on the random things moms say that, when out of context, are completely ridiculous. I believe the question was, "What is the craziest thing you've said as a mom?" Moms submitted their craziest comments—things like, "You can't taste the ice cream by licking the TV!" Silly kids! The responses were so adorable, that I began to keep a list myself on my phone. Only, my list is far less adorable. In fact, when I tried to categorize the quotes into different subjects, the bulk of them fit into one of two categories—crazy or just plain nasty. You be the judge.

Crazy

"I'm gonna knock you out. Mama said knock you out." The time a threat turned into an ironic trip down memory lane.

"Not everything that touches your face is a boob." In context, this was a perfectly innocent comment.

"You guys need to start getting more scared when you hear me talking!"
When discipline goes terribly wrong...

"Stop choking!" No comment.

"I don't want to hear your words...I want to hear your thoughts." Because mind-reading goes along with the eyes in the back of my head.

"Well, now you know the baby doesn't have good ideas." Well, he doesn't.

"Don't pick up the baby...just drag him." An exciting mix of safety and laziness.

"You are right—we don't eat donkeys, we hug them." I just can't with this one.

"That's not Daddy, that's a clown." To be fair, he was at a phase where every man was "Daddy".

"No, if a visitor knocks on the door, call Mommy or Daddy, and we will fight them." Stranger danger.

"I actually don't want to be right all the time. I hope and pray you can be right once in a while." Said that one to my husband, and I'm still waiting...

Nasty

"You can't eat your dinner on the toilet." Technically, you can.

"You can't sit at the dinner table with a naked butt." These first two were part of the same continued conversation.

"Don't drink the poop water!" Why I hate bath time.

“This is not a buffet so just sit there and poop!” There is a lot of pooping while eating at my house.

“I’m the mom; I’ll do whatever I want with my fingers!” Enough said.

“My toenails are so long, they hurt.” TMI, Mom edition.

“I keep my pinky nails long for digging.” Just, don’t ask where...

“Well, fart then, but do it while you clean.” The kids were running out of valid reasons not to clean their room.

“Can’t a woman just clean vomit in peace?” One of the nicer things I’ve asked to do in peace.

“Who threw up in this backpack?” Spoiler alert, turns out it wasn’t vomit...

“He’s got his foot in the toilet again.” Because, indoor plumbing.

“Why is there shredded cheese in your diaper?” Spoiler alert, turns out it wasn’t shredded cheese...

“Stay over here where I can smell you.” Potty training at its finest.

“Eat the food off your face first and then I’ll give you some more.” Very reasonable.

“If you want more chips, eat the ones off the floor.” What do they think, chips grow on trees?

“Get away from that fire! You’re just warming the poop!” Safety first.

“Sure, I’m the queen. And my land’s greatest exports are poop and tears.”

Revelation #5: I need to embrace it – I’m a supervillain

I have written stories (and an [actual book](#)) about my boys as a squad of superhero brothers. The stories basically explain actual, real-life shenanigans from their point of view. When I first came up with the concept, I brainstormed who could serve as the villain they would have to defeat. So, I had to think of things my kids naturally are afraid of, or avoid, or like to punch. The list included things like carrots (from an all-out carrot battle royale in kitchen stadium), the vacuum cleaner, the camera to their

video baby monitor surveillance system, large bugs, bed time, the threat of treat removal, you get the point.

As I'm ticking through the list, I notice that all these things have one thing in common. Me. I'm the one who serves the carrots, uses the vacuum (on occasion), monitors the baby footage, removes the treats, announces the bed time. None of these things are truly villains without me. Except large bugs. They are just nasty all on their own. But everything else—me.

I always use the threat of "Daddy" to get my point across, but it never works because Daddy is a happy, laid-back, delivery system of fun, and treats, and sleepy dreams. He's always working, so his mere presence means it is the weekend, or vacation time. While, I, on the other hand, am a sharp-tongued, screaming banshee who has been known to use manipulation and bribery and in fact spends otherwise free time brainstorming ways to improve the treat-removal process.

This revelation made me sad, at first. Who wants to be the villain? Especially to the beautiful children whom I love and cherish. But what is the alternative? More than a friend, they need a model to teach them how / expect them to behave. I always planned to be strict in the first three years and then they would be molded into the types of people I can handle. But I

didn't plan on how long this process actually takes. Even now, not all of my children have reached the 3 year milestone, and the younger ones are constantly wrecking the learning curve for the older.

So in the meantime, I'm gonna own it. Just call me the Momster.

"Mommy, look! It's you and me!"



Revelation #6: I need to fake it 'til I make it

Okay, so even though I own being a Momster, I've got to better accept that I am in a season in my life where I cannot find a job that pays enough for me to afford childcare. I am educated and I had a career, now I am home with my beautiful children, and one day, I can pursue my career

goals once more. It's easy to say, but it's harder for me in reality. I might be struggling a bit with my new identity. I find that I try to invent new, interesting ways to quantify what it is I do in the home. Although I inherently know that raising my children is the most important thing I'll ever do, I feel like there is a stigma attached to the term stay-at-home mom, and I try to avoid that label by punching up the job description a little. For example, if an old professional colleague of mine asked what I do now, I might respond with:

- "I'm a domestic engineer."
- "I'm doing anthropological research on the effects of living with wild animals."
- "I actually haven't officially stopped working the last three years, but with four kids someone always has strep, or stomach flu, or pinkeye, and I'm almost out of sick days..."
- "You know how they say it takes a village to raise a child? Well, as a twist, I decided to stay home myself and raise a tribe of children."
- "I really enjoy disposing of other people's poop, and you'd be surprised at how few opportunities exist in marketing to do that in a meaningful way."

- “I’m one of those rare people who have a severe phobia of free time and personal space, so naturally this was a great fit for me.”
- “I decided to stay home so I can concentrate on keeping an immaculate house and watching my figure, and...”—I’m sorry, I can’t even type that with a straight face.

See what I mean? I might be having a bit of an identity crisis. Okay, so which of these should I put on my résumé?



Welcome to my new office...

Revelation #7: I need to do a better job

I’ve already established that I have the ability to see my faults, even when I am unwilling or unable to improve upon them. So I can admit that, while I might enjoy working outside of the home, I could possibly enjoy this more if I worked harder at it. Or, if I was in some way better at it—if that is

even possible for me. I spend what I would describe as every waking moment looking at and attending to these children, and yet, I realize that if that were completely true, half of the inventive crap they have pulled in this house could not have occurred. The fried chicken story alone is a testament to the fact that I often don't have a clue what is happening in my own house. I don't know when they find the time, but they always do.

And when they do, as the mother of this home, I must take responsibility, right? Like when I told my husband the two little ones had carefully colored in the grout of our new tile floor under the kitchen table, he of course asked, "Well, where were you?" And the answer is, I was right there, sitting at the table helping the older two with a school project and honestly quite thankful that the other two were unexplainably quiet and out of sight. In fact, even with peeled eyes, no napping, and reducing my shower and toilet time to 30 minutes a week, my precocious children have managed to do some creative things.

Here's my top ten (so far...):

1. Invented "Water Mountain", an at-home amusement park attraction, using only a step stool, a sink, and a beach towel.
2. Reprogrammed the TV settings so that everything was orange using a complex system of button pushing and on-screen menus that was

nearly irreversible. I mean, I seriously considered just throwing the television away and buying a new one.

3. Broke out of the house and ran in the street (I don't want to elaborate on that one).
4. Busted a huge bean bag full of the tiny Styrofoam pellets. Let's just say I now know what it would be like to live in a snow globe.
5. Put the dog in the oven (calm down, it wasn't on).
6. Covered the entire room in poop. I mean, The. Whole. Room.
7. Put the dog in the dryer (we should have gotten a bigger dog, maybe?).
8. Used an entire 20 oz. jar of Eucerin cream on a stuffed animal--waste of money, but his fur has never looked better.
9. Reduced a new 26.8 ounce box of Frosted Flakes into a powder on the floor so fine it was only identifiable by taste.
10. Snuck a bag of chocolate chips out of the pantry and gave some to the dog (okay, maybe we shouldn't have pets).

It is completely reasonable to suggest that I cut down my 30 minutes of weekly bathroom time to 20. 25, maybe? No, you're right. 20 is the number. I'll let you know how that works out. In the meantime, don't stand downwind of me—I don't shower as often as I would like.

Revelation #8: I need to contribute financially

I think one of the main reasons I struggle with staying home is that I feel guilt from not making a financial contribution. I know, mothers the world over just blanched in disgust and yelled aloud in unison, “But you *are* making a contribution to your family!” And this chorus of disgusted mothers is exactly right. However, I am one who feels a certain satisfaction in making my own money—even as it is put into the family account and spent by all. My husband hates this about me—he is always saying, “It is all *our* money. If you made the money and I stayed home, I wouldn’t think twice to spend it.” But something about me specifically can’t get over this completely. Maybe it’s the fact that I like working and saving toward our future. Maybe it’s because I’m so cheap. Whatever it is, it’s here to stay.

I love teaching at the local college two days a week, but it doesn’t earn what I can consider a full income. I tried finding things I could do in the home to make money, but I find I just don’t have the time or passion for any of the endeavors I have thus far endeavored. And I am resigned to the very real possibility that while these kids are still so young, it might be unreasonable to believe I can truly devote the time necessary to run my own business from the home. I need to find something that can incorporate

my skills *and* my kids in order to find something that lasts. I've had a couple of ideas—what do you think of this one for small business venture?

Baby Detective Service:

Missing a watch battery, contact lens, or some other small, potentially hazardous object? Solution: Baby Detectives. They can find any small, sharp item in your house within minutes. Choking-risk, jagged, dangerous, flammable—we've got you covered. Weaponry, plastic bags, tiny rubber bands, no problem! Why might you use this service? Perhaps you are trying to make sure your house is completely baby-proofed. Or maybe you are checking up after your cleaning service (people still have those, right?). Or, I don't know, whatever reason you might want a bunch of tiny children scouring your house for small, dangerous objects. We don't judge, we just deliver results! Have a big job? We will dispatch the whole 4-man team to get the job done right. You can even use us to find "missing persons." There is NO WHERE a person can hide for *one minute* in your home and not be found, guaranteed. Give us a call today!

FINE PRINT: These children cannot locate left socks, right shoes, jackets or hats of any kind, toys that are obviously strewn about during clean-up time, anything that could be described as "staring them right in the face", or remote controls.

I've always wanted a business that utilizes the skillsets of the individuals in my family. Before I had kids, I knew they would get into things, but I don't think I completely understood how much time I spend daily just taking things out of their hands. If I could get paid for that, that would be awesome. Which leads me to my next revelation...

Revelation #9: I need to admit I was wrong

I had some perfect, insurance commercial type fairy tale about what having children would be like. Smiling faces, kissing boo boos, walking on a beach hand in hand with my husband as he hoisted a little mini-me (or mini-him) over his shoulder. Which is silly, because we lived in the Midwest at the time, and spent no time near any large bodies of water. I had all these preconceived notions about what it would be like to have kids, many of which—quite possibly all of which—were wrong. The ladies in my Mothers of Preschoolers group once had a discussion of things they wish they'd known before having kids. Personally, I don't wish I'd known any one thing—ignorance is bliss or so it goes. But if I had to pass on a bit of

general knowledge to my past self about to begin the journey of parenthood, I can come up with a few little nuggets of wisdom.

1. It's harder than you think. I remember how it was. Watching someone's children swing from the rafters, thinking of all the things she *could* be doing to restore order in that moment. I remember what I was thinking. I was a *way* better mother before I had kids. Such strategy. So many crafts. Perfect disciplining. Now, I call it a win if we get home from the store and all four kids have both shoes on. It's easy to think about what you will build without having adorable little monkey wrenches all in the works. This is a lesson I learn daily.
2. It's easier than you think. Yeah, I know what I just said, but at some point it becomes second nature. You learn the different cries, you can sniff out danger, you can cook dinner while talking on the phone and wearing a baby all while mopping the floor and reading *If You Give a Moose a Muffin*. One day, someone will try to help you while you attempt to accomplish 12 things at once and you'll say, "I got it," and realize, it's true. You've got this.
3. How much you love them. It is an immeasurable amount. I knew I would love them—even when they were in the womb, I would think—

wow, I'm so much in love. But just like when your mama told you, "It's only a crush," same thing applies. When you know, *you know*.

4. Labor day isn't necessarily the best day of your life. You hear the gushy stories and think you are supposed to be lying in the hospital bed overcome with love and rainbows and unicorns. And sometimes, you are. But allow yourself to realize that this is a stressful day. Anxiety, fear, depression, pain and shouting obscenities are allowed. If you go into it thinking it will be the perfect day, you are setting yourself up for some serious day-after-Christmas style disappointment.
5. Having kids doesn't mean you love kids. It just means you love *your* kids. Remember, these little guys will grow up. And that won't necessarily leave you with a love of all things toilet training. You don't have to love kids to want a family.
6. You don't lose yourself—you find someone new. If you ever entertained thoughts along the lines of, "I'll still dress up whenever I leave the house," or "I'll work out and eat healthy to keep off baby weight," or "we'll still go on date nights every week," good for you—you've got goals. I wish you luck. Because all things are possible. But after kids you do a little thing called reprioritize. If you still value

your appearance enough to add the necessary time ahead of stepping out the door, awesome. If you can afford a babysitter every week, and have the energy to go out, congrats. But if you don't do all these things, that's fine too. You become different (not better or worse) you when you have kids. It is my intention (and all out challenge) to accept this new person I've become, like her, and move on. I don't have time to second guess my choices because my kids are flooding the toilet with the plunger again.

7. Never say never. And especially don't say it twice, like I just did there. These "nevers" will inevitably come around. And when they do, they will feel like failures. So allow yourself some time to remain open minded. Try to learn from the mistakes of newbie and seasoned parents around you. Take mental notes from what your parents did, or your siblings or your friends. Print this list and put it in your back pocket to refer to later. Then, pull it out and rip it up. Because there are no rules.

And my final revelation: I need to take my own advice

I've got to stop thinking that being a mother is something that one does right or wrong. That there is some perfect mother out there that is

getting it all right, all the time. Or who has found the perfect schedule that allows her to relax at times, actually sitting on a chair, or has found the exact precise amount of bathroom time you can allocate to yourself before your children burn down the house in your absence. You've heard the expression, "Show me a beautiful, perfect woman, and I'll show you a man who's tired of her?" Well, show me a wonderful, perfect mom, and I'll show you some kids who will blame every problem in their adult lives on her one day.

Motherhood. It's a hard job. It's a *dirty* job. It is a *thankless* job. But somebody's got to do it. And in this house, according to God, my husband, and the state of Texas—that person is me.