

Real-Life Daily Drama

Have you ever looked closely at the world of the TV family and wished it were yours? That was me today. It started a little rough, but some time in the gym helped wear away the pain and limber me up to a better attitude. Unfortunately, this “better attitude” was squelched by my eleven-year-old son. Fast. Every word out of my mouth was countered, argued, and whined about. Mornings are normally good for him, so I should count my blessings, but this morning I couldn’t find them.

My son’s wham-bam combination of autism and Tourette’s syndrome, paired with the joy of prepubescence means that my life is never dull. In January, he was removed from public school and put on “homebound” status by his psychiatrist because of his tendency to have severe anxiety issues, culminating in bouts of terrible verbal and physical violence at home. Two different crisis teams began working with us. We have adapted and, yes, he has gotten better, but I’m not sure when I will feel comfortable enough to stop hiding the knives. This is real-life drama.

The real tragedy for me is that my son is the funniest and most laid back, loving, snuggly, kid ever. It’s like watching a fuzzy teddy bear grow fangs and start coming at you with red, glowing eyes. Most of the time people marvel at my calm, positive attitude regarding this change in our family, but today isn’t that day. I feel like I should have Maleficent’s crow on my shoulder and staff in my hand—my poor husband would probably agree.

Normally shoes are my nemesis, but today they were especially troublesome. How about you? Do your kids regularly “poof” their shoes into an invisible status? I won’t say they ever actually lose them because they always somehow appear, but never when I am frantically running behind and about to pull my hair out because they aren’t where they were last lying. Today I sent my son to swim team practice with no shoes. He dramatically walked each of the five steps he had to take on the asphalt like he was on a tightrope . . . covered with thumbtacks. I proceeded to go to four different stores to find replacement shoes in the hour allotted me by the coach, ending with a pair of flip-flops purchased for a dollar from Goodwill.

Shoe fiasco overcome, I farmed my kids off to a, well, a farm. They take therapeutic horseback riding lessons from a gem of a woman named Pam at Copper Crest Farm. This began several months ago and unleashed a piece of my son I had never seen. He seemed to instantly

bond with the horses and genuinely loves them. Sometimes he talks about them for days, going over their names and what they look like and mentioning over and over who he might get to ride during his next session.

Today, he and Austen stayed for four whole hours for the first time. I worried slightly how they would do, but I needn't have. They assist with the more profoundly disabled riders, brush horses, and learn life lessons that wouldn't be taught better anywhere else. If you have a child who faces emotional or physical issues, I highly recommend therapeutic horseback riding. This is such a blessing to our family. I even shovel manure every time I go. After recovering from the initial "yuck" of it, it doesn't faze me. Every area is different, so don't assume that because the program is labeled "therapeutic" that it is a good fit for your child. Find some word-of-mouth advertising about the appropriate stable for you.

I hope you find that magical key that unlocks your child's passion. Even profoundly disabled kids will have things that bring them joy and cause your shoulders to unclench as you watch them blossom. Laughter is not only cleansing for the soul, but it is reassuring for a parent to hear that fabulous sound escape from your child's mouth. Don't give up looking for your child's key to joy. My son is eleven years old and we just discovered horses this year. You can do this! I'm cheering for you!

Rejoicing in the Lord, but still hiding the knives,

Renate Braddy