

Names are changed to honor client confidentiality.

Cherish Moments as a Parent

We're never prepared for Parenthood 101.

Peter De Vries, the late American novelist, would agree. In his book, [*The Tunnel of Love*](#), he humorously professes that the point of marriage is not to produce children, but to turn us into adults.

Parenthood stretches and matures us in ways unforeseen prior to the arrival of our firstborn.

When I ask parents, "What have your children taught you?" I get mixed responses, such as "Not to be one!" from Jo, a mother of three adult children. Her dry-witted honesty left us both laughing.

She continued: "I think we learn the meaning of love more from our children than we do from our parents," she said. "As they go through their ups and downs, we can't help but care for them—feeling their emotions right along with them."

Another parent told me, "I learned that being a good parent doesn't require elaborate plans such as huge family trips, or buying lots of presents on the holidays. It definitely has nothing to do with spending money on them. What kids really want from us is our full attention . . . in the moment."

She said it beautifully, and such sentiments remind me of my own experiences. How have my children taught me? Several years ago—yes, several—I wrote about one of my parental epiphanies. I titled it ***Ramshackle Paradise***. Here it is:

Seized by some rash impulse, I frenetically tore from room to room taking snapshots of my sons' stockpiles of clutter—their messes. Especially photo-worthy was that wall-to-wall variety . . . you know, that layer of "stuff" that coats every inch of floor space in a teenager's room: crumpled clothing—clean and dirty all mixed together, of course—comic books, damp towels, dirty sneakers, electronic gizmos, and wadded-up homework.

I wasn't in a ticked-off state, bent on proving to the world that my sons were hopeless slob. That had been all the days prior. No, my mood this day was one of warm appreciation. I was driven by this simple thought: We need to enjoy and appreciate the time we have with our kids while they're still at home, because one day—suddenly—they and all traces of them will be gone.

That thought replaced my usual mind-set. Like most mothers, my vocabulary had incrementally narrowed to simple commands over the years, such as, “Clean your room,” “Pick up your things,” “Put it away.”

Much of my time had been spent constantly reminding, bribing, begging, getting mad Over the years, I had grown weary from all those pathetic attempts. Nothing but futile, wasted effort.

But on that day something changed. Nothing out of the ordinary occurred. I was just sitting at the table after a routine family meal. Everyone had scattered—going off in separate directions to who-knows-where. The clatter of hustle and bustle was gone, too. I was enjoying the quiet.

I looked around. Stretched out before me were collections of disarray—things that belonged to the younger occupants of the house. And oddly, instead of feeling tortured by the sight, I was enveloped by a wave of fondness. At that very moment, I realized how precious those messes were. In fact, they no longer represented messes. Like an archeological find, I saw them as signs of life belonging to an era that would never be replicated.

I remember thinking, Someday, I would gladly give a million dollars just to sit and view this very same sight again. When I’m 60 or 80, I’ll want nothing more than to be able to transport myself back to this very instant in time and feast my eyes on exactly what I’m seeing right now—not some cleaned up, sanitized and soulless house. Everything in its place is boring compared to what I am looking at here.

I was seeing signs of life, not dead order.

Those so-called messes were as distinct as the personalities that created them. Strewn throughout the house was a record of everything that made them unique—a record saying that they were here. Lucky for me, I got to share ‘here’ with them. And I still have my photos.

On that day my children taught me about priorities and cherishing the moment.

An illuminating statement by Jon Kabot-Zinn, author and teacher of mindful meditation, bears out this lesson: “I like to think of children as tiny Zen masters parachuting into your life to teach you what you need to know about being present.”

If you’re a parent, I suggest that you take a walk through your house when it’s empty of people and view it with new eyes. Absorb the uniqueness of your child. Absorb the moment.