

No More Oatmeal Kisses

Marshall Reid

The following was written by the late Erma Bombeck in one of her newspaper columns on January 29, 1969. It's a great reminder to mothers (and fathers) of just how quickly your children will grow up and leave the home. You don't have much time with them. Make the most of it.

A young mother writes: "I know you've written before about the empty-nest syndrome, that lonely period after the children are grown and gone. Right now I'm up to my eyeballs in laundry and muddy boots. The baby is teething; the boys are fighting. My husband just called and said to eat without him, and I fell off my diet. Lay it on me again, will you?"

OK. One of these days, you'll shout, "Why don't you kids grow up and act your age!" And they will. Or, "You guys get outside and find yourselves something to do...and don't slam the door!" And they won't.

You'll straighten up the boys' bedroom neat and tidy: bumper stickers discarded, bedspread tucked and smooth, toys displayed on the shelves. Hangers in the closet. Animals caged. And you'll say out loud, "Now I want it to stay this way." And it will.

You'll prepare a perfect dinner with a salad that hasn't been picked to death and a cake with no finger traces in the icing, and you'll say, "Now, there's a meal for company." And you'll eat it alone.

You'll say, "I want complete privacy on the phone. No dancing around. No demolition crews. Silence! Do you hear?" And you'll have it.

No more plastic tablecloths stained with spaghetti. No more bedspreads to protect the sofa from damp bottoms. No more gates to stumble over at the top of the basement steps. No more clothespins under the sofa. No more playpens to arrange a room around.

No more anxious nights under a vaporizer tent. No more sand on the sheets or Popeye movies in the bathroom. No more iron-on patches, rubber bands for ponytails, tight boots or wet knotted shoestrings.

Imagine. A lipstick with a point on it. No baby-sitter for New Year's Eve. Washing only once a week. Seeing a steak that isn't ground. Having your teeth cleaned without a baby on your lap.

No PTA meetings. No car pools. No blaring radios. No one washing her hair at 11 o'clock at night. Having your own roll of Scotch tape.

Think about it. No more Christmas presents out of toothpicks and library paste. No more sloppy oatmeal kisses. No more tooth fairy. No giggles in the dark. No knees to heal, no responsibility.

Only a voice crying, “Why don’t you grow up?” and the silence echoing, “I did.”

If you’re a parent, and if Erma’s poignant admonition to mothers doesn’t cause a tear to come to your eyes, I’d be surprised. I know it hits me right in the gut.

Oh how precious the time is we have with our children! How much of it I’ve wasted and how much regret I have! This is something I need to take out and read more often to remind me of how I need to spend the rest of the precious little time I have left with my children before they leave our home and are on their own.

Not only do we need to cherish the time we have with our children, but we need to make sure that time is spent filled with the right things: love, teaching, instruction, and most importantly, instilling in them a knowledge of and faith in God.

There are many things that factor into whether or not you’re a successful parent. But one thing you can be assured of— if your children learn to love the Lord and follow him because of your example and your teaching, then you’ve been a success.

Our time with our children is short. Every moment with them should be a lesson in loving and following God. If we don’t teach them to love the Lord, the world will teach them not to.