



By Tara Rummell Berson (Middletown, New Jersey)

An Imperfectly Perfect Life Lesson

"Yes, Mother. I can see you are flawed. You have not hidden it. That is your greatest gift to me."

—Alice Walker (author of "The Color Purple")

During my twenties, when I'd daydream about motherhood, I remember smiling about how perfect it would be—how perfect I'd be.

We all have a sublime view of what life will look like after a big event. Some of us may be thrilled about the prospect of immediately landing our dream job after graduating, while others coo about how blissful marriage will be after their wedding day. Many of us yearn for how accomplished we'll feel after finally crossing off a bucket list item. And some of us hold the naïve view that we'll be model parents—well, at least most of time.

And then reality hits. Life gets messy. And all of those goals and moments that you thought would work out so perfectly are harder to achieve than you imagined, or aren't as amazing as you had envisioned. I've found this to be particularly true when it comes to the hard work of parenting.

I was mentally prepared—somewhat—for the transition from married life to motherhood, but what I didn't expect is how incredibly challenging daily life would be, despite that fact that everything, according to my 'life plan', seemed perfect (loving husband, two healthy kids, cuddly dog, perfect house in the 'burbs, etc.).

Since having children, there's been a lot more self-doubt...and guilt. There have been many times that I've questioned whether or not I'm a good enough person, a good enough mom, a good enough writer...or simply, good enough.

The more I've traveled this bumpy yet rewarding road of parenthood, the more I've had to let my Type A personality go; let my need for perfection go. Becoming a mother really threw me for a loop because most things have been out of my control. My life isn't just about me. My decisions

and actions affect my family, and my world revolves around my kids' needs and schedules, so I've had to find a way to make it jibe—and believe me, it's not always pretty.

For example, I always thought I'd have healthy and creative meals planned for my kids, not resort to mac and cheese for dinner three times in a week because it was the easy way out. And I truly thought that I'd be able to balance being a wife, mom, daughter, sister, friend, social coordinator, homemaker, etc. along with my career without freaking out. Instead, I've ended up feeling defeated; like I'm not good at any of it—at least not at the same time.

To be honest, I've wondered whether my kids are going to end up on a couch one day discussing all the ways I screwed them up with their therapist. They've seen me sobbing in the middle of the kitchen floor or hurling a shoe at the wall over something stupid that set me off. And through my tears, I've wondered if crying in front of them or losing my cool makes me seem weak (or slightly insane). They've heard me complain incessantly about how I do everything in the house or how work is stressing me out, and in the back of my mind, I fear that I'm planting seeds that I don't appreciate their father or that I'm not grateful that I have a job.

They've seen me shovel a fistful of Doritos in my mouth and chase it with a Hershey's Kiss as a poor substitution for lunch, while I scold them for not eating their vegetables. I get angry at them for not cleaning up their rooms, but they've had to move piles of unfolded laundry just to sit on the couch. And they've heard me preach about making good choices, but have witnessed me getting pulled over by the police because it looked like I was talking on my cell phone (which

thankfully I wasn't!). In essence, they've seen me during some not-so-flattering, hypocritical moments. Moments I'm not super proud of—and moments that you're probably judging me for right now!—but they're real.

While I'm busy beating myself up over stuff like this, I try to not go off the deep end by reflecting on some of my more 'shining moments'—something I highly recommend. Because despite some of the negativity and imperfections your kids will see, they'll also witness a lot of positivity.

In my case, I think about how my son has seen my face light up over an awesome hit he got during his Little League game or after he told me that he read a whole chapter of Harry Potter by himself. My daughter has seen me beam with pride during her gymnastics or dance performances (no matter how good or bad she does!), and when she proudly recites her ABCs.

My kids have seen my eyes well up whenever they turn a year older because I want to hold on to their childhood forever. They've heard me belly laugh, felt my hugs and kisses whenever they've gotten hurt, listened to my praise whenever I see them being kind and compassionate, and they've looked at each other and giggled when they've seen me kiss their dad 'just because'. And while they've also seen me get overwhelmed with work, they know that I enjoy it and that it helps pay the bills (and buys them some extra trips to the toy store!).

What I've come to realize is that for all the low points you may have as a parent, the good ones far outweigh the bad. So while I may not be a model human being or mom, all of the time, I have to remind myself that I am doing some things right. And that's a lesson you should take to heart as well.

Something my Mom wrote to me on Mother's Day struck a chord and made me feel better. She said: "You're a wonderful mother to your children. Every day you teach them what's important in life and what's not."

Boy did that mean a lot—especially coming from my own mother who raised me well. When you boil down parenting, it's really about teaching your children about what matters most in life. It's about instilling values. And it's also about reassuring them that it's okay to not be perfect...because life isn't perfect. So, yes, my children have seen my flaws and weaknesses, but instead of being ashamed of my imperfections, I'm showing them that you can have them and still be a good person.

You may not deal with every situation appropriately or make all the right calls. All you can do is try harder next time. Just like you learned that your life path has peaks and valleys, your kids will learn that theirs will be filled with ups and downs—and that's normal. You can aspire to have a lot more 'ups', but if you don't experience the 'downs' you won't appreciate the highs as intensely...as joyously.

By allowing your kids to see what's real, they'll learn to appreciate those fleeting, beautiful moments of perfection. They'll cherish those gifts nestled in between their less-than-stellar experiences much more because of what you weren't afraid to show them.



Photo credit: Catherine Elizabeth

Tara Rummell Berson is a writer, editor and blogger. She's been on staff at REDBOOK magazine and has contributed to numerous national media outlets. Tara also freelanced regularly for A&E Television Networks and iVillage.com and is currently a senior editor for health and wellness website KnowMore.tv. In 2011, she launched The Crankiness Crusher™ (TCC), a WordPress blog and Facebook community. TCC is an online platform that encourages people to focus on the big and small things that bring them happiness on a daily basis and was recently featured in the book, *Inspiring Hope: One Story at a Time*. In addition to her editorial background, Tara has extensive PR experience and is an adjunct communications professor. She lives at the Jersey Shore with her husband, two young children and dog.