

## ... and Reality Makes 3!

By Mykal White

*After* the anxious anticipation of pregnancy, those first few weeks at home with your baby, the hours staring in disbelief at this tiny person you can't believe you created, the certain surrendering to the interruption of everything we knew before becoming a Parent...

There is life, of course.

Parenthood itself, is a crap shoot. Sure there are odds and a decent level of measured risk, but bringing a child into this world is life's greatest gamble. Regardless of how many books and parenting publications we devour pre-baby, we can never know what each child will ask of us until they are already here and asking.

Knowing that kids don't come with a set of individual instructions and the daily reality of raising actual human beings without that phantom handbook are two very different things. The wonderful news is that none of us have this parenting business figured out. The easy theory is that great children come out of great families and problematic children are born out of conflict prone environments. Meanwhile - some of the most dysfunctional people have come from a "picture perfect" home life and some of the most brilliant and creative minds have risen beautifully out of the ash of tragic beginnings. (Shrug) Go figure. Point is: its anyone's game.

Surprises are not surprises if you expect them to come. There are funny, crazy and brutally honest things our young kids will say or have said that leave us speechless and with our mouths hanging open. There are things we never could have imagined or believed we'd hear ourselves say as Parents. There are emotions that surface, situations that cause us to question if we are handling them right. These are the types of surprises I refer to.

If only the greatest questions to consider are whether to breast or bottle feed and that our children are developing at a rate appropriate for each stage of growth. If only it was merely as simple as handling an intrusive mother in law or weighing the options of the best educational toys on the market.

All of us in our own way romanticize about the type of parent we might be. Although rarely admitted aloud, among us are those who fall head over heels in love with our first child, only to experience guilt at openly loving the second child in fear of damaging the relationship we have with our first. Or ... consider for a moment how a woman would

know to emotionally ready herself in advance for the bittersweet ache that may surface at seeing her own parents from whom she rarely received hugs - go on to shower her newborn daughter (their grandchild) with the love she had craved to feel from them her whole life?

What about the father who expects so much of his sons, demanding that they be the best at everything because he, himself, is driven by the ghosts of his own failures and regret? How does he know beforehand to expect the inner war coming along with being that type of dad?

And ahhhhhhhh ... "Mommy Guilt." That's the best, isn't it? We'd always heard so much about it and occasionally may have even taken pleasure in exploiting that emotion with our own moms once or twice or regularly growing up - but holy applesauce is it the WORST when you're standing on the other side of that guilt as a mom yourself. Ugh. It's just awful.

You, your child and *Reality* ... make 3. Life is the shaded area that lives between the two extremes of black and white. Raising kids is in all the variables that we have no control over other than how we manage our reactions to them. The craziest part of it all is that most of it happens under short notice and without any warning.

Our kids may grow up to be parents themselves one day. How many of us swear that we will never make the mistakes our parents made, but do not consider that we will go on to create a legacy of mistakes all our own? Life is a curvy road, and our kids definitely don't come with that set of customized instructions. That leaves quite an unfair margin for error, wouldn't you say? So give yourselves a break. We all do the best we can. However, it would be interesting to keep an account of some of those surprises along the way that we never plan for. Creating breadcrumbs to highlight this stuff also helps not only to keep the human side to most of it in perspective, but to shed a different light on it as we remember that we really are handling them to the best of our imperfect ability and on incredibly short notice.

*Breadcrumbs* captures not only the date but the ages of both parent and child. Why? Because one day, they will live to see that very same age as the day we recorded that moment for them so many years before. It's not only about sharing some of the surprises in our story together, but will also close a bit of the loop as my daughter at 34 years old gets a glimpse into my life as a 34 year old mother with an 8 year old daughter. Then on the other side of that window is a view into who she was and how she thought and some of the things she was putting me through good, frustrating and crazy at that time as well.

Life is hard, messy, joyful, unpredictable work. Kids are indeed as wonderful as everyone said they would be, but at times ... Whoa! Parenting is a challenge! Why not create a unique chamber that allows them access into that side of the reality as well?

Besides, who would get a kick out of this stuff more than our grown up kids?