

Learning lessons from our offspring

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?While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about.?

? Angela Schwindt

Ever since human beings began to have families and raise children, the world was forever changed.

These tiny creatures are gifts, but they're here to test us, frustrate us, drive us to the edge of the abyss. But they're also here to teach us about some very fundamental aspects of our species.

I think the secret of living is to carry the spirit of our inner child well into old age, so we never lose our sense of wonder and enthusiasm.

My three offspring have provided me with much over the years, as revealed by the grey hairs I?now sport. Child-rearing is a huge challenge, but nowhere else does one receive such a crash course in humanity.

We learn by doing. We were all kids once.

The neatest thing about kids is they never cease to amaze me and teach me new things. While I can wow them with facts, figures and my own brand of wit and sarcasm, they often give me a fresh perspective on things.

I think I'll keep them!

My son Liam turned 13 over the weekend. One would think a small gathering of eight boys in the basement would be rather uneventful and quiet.

I'm surprised just how much noise eight male voices can make.

The beauty of boy children is they're pretty easy to please. Give them pizza, hotdogs, cake and refreshments, give them something to do, and voila, a successful afternoon.

We took them tobogganing so they'd use energy and tone down their hyper-activity.

Acting out scenarios from their favourite video games, the boys, armed with toy guns, staged mock battles and were quite busy for most of the afternoon. No drama, no fights, no bad language.

They must have had plenty of stored energy, because they remained quiet for the time it took to swallow a couple of dogs and slices of pizza. And then, the battle began anew.

At the end of the day, all left happy.

While not a monumental happening or even a footnote in modern psychological teachings, there is always a lesson to be learned from our younglings.

?Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.? ? Kay Redfield Jamison

In this case, my son and his friends proved one important thing ? the necessity of play.

There is nothing so pure, so unfettered as fun. The shouts of joy and laughter were monumental. A few helium-filled balloons become worth their weight in gold where young boys are concerned. They sucked the gas out of the orbs and all sounded like Alvin and the Chipmunks, all for a few bucks. Did I mention that males are easily pleased?

I think adults tend to forget the need for stress-relieving antics. Sure, as a family we head out, go snow tubing and rush down the hills at 60 kilometres per hour. We go to the movies and enjoy family dinners.

But moms and dads need to hit the deck, roll around on the floor and giggle. We need to be silly.

In this case, I do know something about the male psyche.

Girls, on the other hand, continue to confound me.

My eldest entertained 60 of her friends at her 16th birthday recently. This too, went off without a hitch, aside from one minor food fight. But again, give them plenty of food, water and activities and they're good to go.

This particular gathering did require a bit more parental monitoring, but my wife handled the duties.

I am trying to get a handle on the female psyche, but my girls are just as enigmatic as the female species itself.

They simply won't come over to the 'dark side'?no matter how much I rave about the educational qualities of Star Trek; the engineering marvels of modern aircraft or the potential for space exploration. They don't get weapons, funny noises or our brand of humour.

My eldest wants to travel the world; use only fair trade products; enjoy musicals on Broadway and help save the planet. What?At 16?

My teen antics pale in comparison. I don't want to tell you what I was preoccupied with at 16 but it didn't involve volunteer work, examining my own inner spirituality or travel.

Don't get me wrong, I support all of her passions and interests. I love her sense of adventure and passion. I'm impressed and astounded at her maturity and sense of responsibility. She's already been asking me about her future and what career route she should pursue.

A child can ask questions that a wise man cannot answer.?

My youngest girl is still in 'play'?mode, dressing up, playing with Barbies and honing her sense of wit and sarcasm. She's a powerhouse and hates failing at anything. She can be immovable and reminds me constantly about my own bad behaviour. She perplexes me with questions about everything from the miracle of birth to the creation of the universe. And she expresses her love of horses and artistic endeavours.

I realize that it's far easier to nurture strong children than repair broken adults, but the game plan is constantly evolving, changing shape.

But one remains the same ? we should talk less and listen more to our kids. We should watch and learn.