

Knowing we've done well as parents

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How do we know that we've done our job well?

As a parent, at what point do we take credit for our handiwork?

I'm talking about our children. I know that some days we want to remain anonymous and hope no one asks who the parent of that misbehaving child is.

How many of us have waltzed away from our goofball teen, pretending not to know them?

We've invested a great deal in these creatures so it's in our best interest to ensure their success and longevity. I read that it costs more than \$20,000 to care for a dog over its lifespan. I wonder just how much it costs us to raise a child. Just when does this village raising a child thing kick in?

With three mouths to feed, six arms, legs and feet to clothe, I imagine my three have dented the bank account for roughly the equivalent of the cost of a brand new Lamborghini. Of course, I wouldn't trade my children in for such a thing that depreciates as soon as you drive it off the lot. Who would take them?

I've often thought about renting them out for a weekend or two, to lonely grandmas and grandpas who don't have young ones to look after.

We want our kids to be unique individuals.

But, alas, in many ways they are us. My boy is me.

The other day his high school drama teacher said that my male child has potential. He's quite funny and really gets his classmates going. My son?

My father was fond of saying the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, and it appears he was correct in this case. I was a bit of a class clown in my day and yes, I can be quite funny. But my humour includes a rapier sharp wit and refined art of sarcasm.

But wait a minute, isn't Liam sarcastic? Where did he learn that?

OMG. The student really does listen to the master. When you get zinged by one of your children, you're taken aback, almost frozen in your footsteps. As good as he may be, he is not a Jedi yet! I will reveal my secrets one at a time.

But recently, his quick comebacks and spot-on retorts have made me smile. I have done my job well.

And there are times when I feel all is lost, or at least misplaced.

We were at a country store filled with antiques over the weekend. On a shelf, I spotted an antique radio. Why doesn't it play old music?? my son asked.

Because it's a radio, not a time machine, I responded.

I then proceeded to tell him how radios work, offering a jab or two at his momentary lapse in logic.

Yes, kids and teens do say the darndest things.

Then I pass by a photo in the hallway of our home of my youngins when they were wee ones. Bright-eyed, curly haired cuties all of them. Wow. The years may have been kind to them, but to me, I'm not so sure.

My youngest, who's the most sponge-like of the lot, has a crazy expression she perfected from me. When confronted with a barb, she looks at me, clenches her fist and says "I oughta ...?" Her impression is spot-on, despite the fact this phrase comes from the legendary

Three Stooges that were way before her time.

She is me.

While she's a pistol this one, she has her moments. When she kisses you goodnight and says "I love you daddy," I know I've done my job.

I help my kids with their homework on a regular basis and it's these occasions I realize how times have changed. I was never fond of math, and I am even less fond of it now.

My youngest, who's in Grade 5, recently studied nuclear power and the basics of nuclear fission. What? I don't know many learned adults who understand nuclear fission!

I can help edit their English and creative writing papers, but I'm often taken to task when I use "big words."

Some of the assignments are tough, even for me. I don't recall our high school tests or essays being this in-depth or comprehensive. Sure, the kids today have the bonus of being able to use the Internet to garner information, saving them trips to the library. But the teachers demand an even higher level and quality of work.

When my kids bring home As and really enjoy school, I have done my job. When they are sent to the office, I blame my wife.

My eldest is a truly giving person. She does mission work and makes regular visits to Toronto to help the homeless. She is a thinker and a doer.

I don't know if I can take credit for any of her qualities. She did mention in a recent birthday card that I have helped her immensely and my pride gives her great strength to carry on.

I suppose that's testament enough.

Our children are likely works in progress. Like any artistic endeavour, we are constantly tweaking them and fine-tuning their characteristics.

Unlike raising a dog, our children need constant attention and care.

As we prepare them to take on the world, we hope the world accepts and welcomes them.

It's a heck of a responsibility and since very few of us have a degree in parenting, we do our best. We stay late after class and sometimes miss the bus and have to walk home. We stay up late into the night marking papers. We counsel them and guide them through heartbreaks and various other teen trials and tribulations.

In the end, we are proud parents of once little fingers and toes.

Considering we create human beings that take on the world, I think we've done our jobs well.