

# TOO MANY TODDLERS TO TOLERATE: A TINY TALE OF TODAY'S TOUGH TIMES

## GABBY LYNCH WRL Community Art Project

Underneath the blanket with my hoodie on and tightly pulled around my head, I am hiding from my children. I'm on the couch in the living room. They walk by and don't even see me. It's glorious. They keep saying "Mom?" and I stay as still as a Terracotta warrior. I literally made a Mom Gilly Suit. Military be proud. Eventually, I reveal myself, and the jig was up. I had to get someone some milk.

"Mom! There you are! You hiding under the blanket the whole time!" laughed Sophia.

"Ha ha! You got me!"

"Get me some milk," she rudely asks.

"Excuse me?"

"Mommmmm, get me some milk now," she demands. I squint my eyes and purse my lips and say "how do we ask, Sophia?"

"Ughhhhhh, mom, get some milk please?" (she says please as please, she's 3 so words are still tough, similar to the difficulty of finding a missing sippy cup when it's lying next to one's foot.)

My hand reaches for her princess sippy cup and I oblige. As I walk to the kitchen, I see a toy on the floor, but for some reason, my brain doesn't register the height I would need to raise my foot to not step on it. *Damnit! I just saw it and I still stepped on it!* Out loud I mumble to myself because, you know, we can't "curse" in front of our children. *Eff.* I proceed to the fridge and get the milk. I unscrew her sippy cup top and then the milk top, magically juggling them both in my mom hands. I pour the milk then try to put the sippy cup lid on the milk carton. Honestly, I do this all the time. Then, I fix the issue with my brain power and put the milk back in the fridge. Lid

is on tight and I hand it to Sophia. She takes it, starts walking away, and I loudly say, "You're WELCOME!" I get a slight nod as she continues to walk into the family room. Standing alone in the kitchen, I glance around and see the dishes piled up so high that you couldn't even put a glass under the faucet to get some water. The counters have day-old sippy cups, leftover snacks, and the kids' artwork. "Artwork" that literally has only three lines on it, but I love their creative little minds. They're proud of their work and say "it's for you mom." *Thanks, Van Gogh.*

Now that I am alone in my kitchen, I know I have to unload the dishwasher, load it, and then start making the dear ones some dinner because it was already four o'clock. Four is the time when they are all hungry, so I have to hurry up and make dinner before they fill up on snacks. As I start unloading the dishwasher, Evangeline and Max come in to ask about seven questions:

1. Mom, can I have some milk?
2. What are you doing?
3. Can I have chocolate and marshmallows?
4. I'm hungry, can I have a snack?
5. Can I help you make dinner?
6. Pick me up...up...up!
7. Can I have that thing over there that I don't know what it is but it's pretty and looks like a sugary treat (pointing to a kitchen sponge)?

Did I say *seven* questions? What I meant was that I hear seven questions, but they continue the verbal assault of ridiculous and illogical questions. I start to tune them out. I acquiesce to Evangeline's request for milk, but I let Max know that he may not have chocolate and marshmallows. His brow furrows deeply like a valley in Mordor and growls, "I want chocolate and marshmallows now mommy!" I quickly look around for a way to escape this small stubborn child, but I hold my ground, because, you know, I am an adult. I look at him and calmly say, "No Max. We will have chocolate and marshmallows AFTER dinner, not before." All of the sudden, his face turns bright red, his head starts to spin and fire spews from his mouth as he yells, "CHOCOLATE AND

**MARSHMALLOWS!!!!!!!**" He won. I lost. I am so tired from arguing with my little lawyers that I am worn down - and he knows it. He's only two, but he's a sneaky little genius who knows how to wield a hardy temper tantrum. "Ok, Max, but promise me you'll eat your dinner ok?" And the red-faced monster turns angelic and smiles the cutest smile with that small little gap in his front teeth and says, "Ok mommy. I love you Mommy." Then I lost again. Because he said he loves me. My heart melts. He may have won the battle, but I shall win this war -maybe?

After Max gets his treats, Jonah, Sophia and Eva all want chocolate and marshmallows too. Since we live in a "communist" household, I have to be "fair" and give them all treats so as to evade a meltdown. The chocolate and marshmallows are handed out, all of them go back to the playroom or living room. I sigh deeply and then baby Catherine starts to cry. She's hungry. I still have to unload and load the dishwasher, make dinner, and it's now 4:15. So, I put Catherine in her highchair, I give her a pouch and some fruit melts. *That should occupy her for a half hour,* I thought to myself. As I begin unloading the dishwasher, she cries. I look over and all her food is gone. It's not even on the floor! My petite bebe gobbled it all up like a hotdog-eating champion. I look at her with awe and she smiles at me. I smile back and continue the chores. I don't like doing dishes or laundry or picking up toys all day, but I do it because I love my family. When I think about how much they mean to me, it makes the burden of doing chores more peaceful, which is totally needed in my loud and crazy house. I pick up a clean plate and in walks Max. Satiated from his chocolate and marshmallow, he began helping me unload the dishwasher. It's a little bit stressful when toddlers want to help, but it's definitely less work than dealing with a screaming banshee. I smile as he hands me a cup. Then, he sneezes three times. I'm sorry to say, but he did not cover his mouth. *Oh well.* I left the plague-ridden dishes to be cleansed again. He continues to help by pulling one cup out at a time while saying, "here go, here go. Here go!" After the dishes are put away, Max leaves and Eva comes in to ask me what I was doing (again). "I'm about to make dinner." She asks if she can help. I smile and say, "Yes! That would be awesome." My little helper. She always wants to assist me with picking up toys, laundry, and anything else I

may need help with. Preschool-age children aren't really good at chores, but giving them the opportunity to help teaches them independence, service for others, and it makes for a calm moment.

She pulls one of the kitchen chairs over to the counter and watches me while I begin chopping up vegetables. She starts moving her hand towards the knife and I immediately stop to glare at her saying, "you may not reach over to me while I have the knife, ok? I don't want to cut your fingers off!" She nods in agreement, but less than ten seconds later, that quality advice goes right in one ear and out the other as she reaches again.

"No!" I yelled.

"Sorry mama."

I scoot her chair farther from me and when I finish chopping vegetables, I let her pour canned goods into a pot to cook and some water in a pot to boil for pasta. Little tasks like this ease my stress and make my kiddos happy. While dinner was cooking, the clock read 4:45. Jonah came in to demand I give him food because he was *starving*. *Kid, you don't know what starving looks like*, I think to myself. "I am making dinner right now, so you will be fed in about ten minutes," I said.

"But MOM, I am so hungry! Can't I just have some snacks?" he moans.

"No."

"Except that I am starving and Evangeline got snacks," he begs.

"Those were left over from yesterday. If you want something to eat, you may have a leftover snack from the floor in the playroom," I smile as I say this because he wouldn't want the snacks on the floor. Only babies and toddlers eat snacks from the floor. He glares at me and stomps back into the living room.

I am alone in the kitchen. Oh no, never mind, I'm not. Catherine is still in her high chair, but at least she was quiet-

"Aghhh! Nduh nduh duh!" she says.

"Yes? May I help you little lady?"

"Duh nnnnduh nduh duh duh," she replied.

"Yes, that's quite interesting. Tell me more."

She smiles and says, "ah ah ah, bluh nduh."

"Oh, right, you wish we could leave the house and explore the world again but we can't because COVID 19 surrounds us all and we are all stuck in this together and some people are dying and all the lonely people are going crazy and all the moms and dads are going crazy and all the people all over the world are going crazy, but at least we have each other, right?"

Catherine smiles and says, "Nnduh."

"I totally agree with you," and I give her a little kiss.

In this strange and weird time where people are static, we realize some very important things in life. That we all need toilet paper to survive. In fact, a week after the government gave the order to stay home, I found some TP at Target. Not the Target off of Monticello, but the secret Target people in Williamsburg forget about: the one next to Water Country USA. This hidden gem always has plenty of clearance items. And - toilet paper. We have been stuck in the house for over a month and we are still surviving on this same bundle of toilet paper. If we didn't have this precious nether region wiping substance, I fear we all would have crashed, burned, and died...in some way or another. Nah, we will be alright. We can always use leaves from the backyard, amiright? Some days, especially now, I wish I was a kid again. Summer vacation started on March 20th! I mean, no school for the rest of the year? How awesome is that?

*It's not awesome.*

I'm drowning in anxiety. I am drowning in tears from small children. I am drowning in laundry, dirty dishes, toys, pollen, (thanks Spring!) dirt, crumbs, stickers, dried-up Play Doh, Legos of all shapes and sizes, Jonah's underwear, pull ups, diapers, wipes, feces from small butts, snot, boogers, paper, crayons, markers, paint brushes, pillows, blankets, cereal, books, ice packs for all the booboos, Band-Aids from all the booboos, Hershey Kiss wrappers, pebbles from our driveway, a snail, a spider, spiderwebs, and all the scribbles all over the walls in every room from my little artists

who totally forget that there's no drawing on the walls.

My husband Ken is teleworking from home so when he gets off work, or rather, when he opens the door from the workshop and steps into the hallway then to the kitchen, I immediately feel relief. This guy, the one who created these five children with me, is the most patient, loving, caring, sweet, helpful, creative, fun man I have ever known. If it wasn't for him, we'd wouldn't have children. If it wasn't for him, I would be in an asylum, in a padded room. If it wasn't for Ken, we wouldn't have this house and all of its furnishings. If it wasn't for Ken, we would be dead. I'm counting my blessings in this weird, chaotic, and frustrating time. I am grateful for everything, even though I do complain sometimes, or, frequently. Because everyone suffers. No matter if you are rich or poor, black or white, American or Canadian, chubby, skinny, introverted or extroverted, nice or mean, with family or all alone, we all suffer. And through this suffering, we are strengthened in some way or another. Especially if we have all the toilet paper.

"Keep Calm and Carry On"-Winston Churchill

"Keep Calm and then let it all out by writing a short blurb about my life."-Me

