

A Balancing Act

By Kris Bordessa

When homeschooling parents get together, the conversation can range from discussion about the difficulties being experienced within their own family to an exchange of ideas and support.

Following discussions that focus on successes rather than difficulties, I've heard parents – often those new to homeschooling – voice concern that they are the only ones who can't "get it all together". Listening to or reading about the success stories of others can make someone that is having doubts feel very unsuccessful indeed. The reality of it is, we are all just barely holding it together, especially if we compare ourselves to those magazine layouts showcasing perfect homes!

Yes, we may have success stories to share, good ideas or stories regarding a child finally attaining a goal. But what isn't shared – at least not regularly – is the fact that our laundry is spilling over the top of the hamper, dinner is still in the freezer at 4:00 p.m. and the dining table hasn't been used for a meal in a week because of the latest project. Showers haven't been a part of our every day routine in years and the curling iron and other fancy stuff hasn't seen daylight since the first Bush administration. Yes, we all have successful days of learning, but sometimes they are completed in our pajamas.

The other day I had a phone call from my neighbor. She was away from home, and feared that she had left the stove on. Knowing that I am often home during the day, she called to ask if I'd run over and check. I had only been inside her house on one other occasion. Wow! It was spotless. The white kitchen floor shined, and there was a certain lack of clutter that I haven't seen since before my kids were born.

I hurried home and frantically began to do a "guilt cleaning". You know the kind; the panicked, have-to-hurry-and-get-it-done-before-anyone-sees-that-my-house-isn't-as-clean-as-hers kind of cleaning. As I cleaned, I wondered, is it possible to have a tidy house *and* homeschool? Her kids go to public school and she doesn't have to deal with people living in the house every day, all day. It didn't take too long to realize that I was fighting a losing battle. For every toy I picked up, two more came out.

In the middle of scrubbing my sink, I realized that someone had left the door wide open and outside animals were trying to enjoy the inside life. Scooting cats out the door, I found that someone had emptied their boots of sand in the middle of the kitchen. Getting the broom to sweep up this new mess, I remembered my laundry and discovered that the washing machine had run a complete cycle without anything in it. Heading to the laundry basket to try again, I was intercepted by a hungry child, claiming that he would die of starvation if he didn't eat *now*! Oh, my goodness, a glance at the clock tells me dinner needs to hit the table in exactly one hour! So much for that clean house...

I think that for most home educators, somewhere along the line we begin to evaluate our priorities. And while I will always wish that my house were cleaner, I also know that the days I have as my children's mom – the one who knows just about everything and is someone to be proud of and adored – are numbered. All too soon, they will hit puberty and decide that I am the most embarrassing person they know.

I think it is important to be able to strike a balance, somewhere in between spotless and functionality. While I've personally given up on spotless, I also realize that if it gets too out of

control we waste precious time trying to find "lost" items and searching for a clean pair of socks.

Many home educators include their children in some of the daily housework, as part of their contribution to the family. Mine is no exception. The boys have chores that they are expected to accomplish, and most of the time they actually do. As they get older their duties will increase. I see this as an opportunity to make sure that as grown men, they are able to fend for themselves comfortably, and perhaps one day be a husband who isn't afraid to tackle a little house cleaning. But even with the assistance of my children, there is still always something that gets left undone.

Will they remember that on occasion their mom served cold cereal for dinner? Or that the glass doors would provide enough forensic evidence to keep a detective busy for a year? I doubt it. I think that the sticky floors will be lost in their memory - if indeed they even noticed the sticky floor; after all they are children!

What will be remembered are the rainy days spent snuggling on the couch reading our favorite stories, laying flat on our backs watching the summertime sky or bundling up to watch the cold winter one. They will remember spending time chasing butterflies, tickle fights and that their dad makes a mean batch of brownies.

Having people in the house 24/7 makes it all the more difficult to keep a tidy house. As long as <http://web.archive.org/web/20071013012900/http://www.krisbordessa.com/there> are people creating a trail, there will always be something to pick up. Learning to balance the demands of homeschooling with the duties of cleaning house is an ongoing process that I don't think I will ever perfect. So for now, I will try to focus on the small victories.

For instance, not one, but both of my bathrooms have been cleaned today. On the same day! Now that's something I can feel successful about. Never mind the rest of the house.

This article first appeared in *Right at Home*

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