

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

Finding Beauty in the Messiness of Life

I recently made a terrible parenting mistake. One that I swore I would never make. I've seen far too many well-intentioned people make this mistake. They want to prevent a loved one or someone they lead from feeling pain, making mistakes, embarrassing themselves, or accidentally going against a social norm.

What was that terrible mistake that I made?

I told our four-year old daughter, Aracelli, not to play in the mud. Worse, I got mad at her for doing so.

That may not seem like a big deal to some of you. After all, there are important things to protect. Like our carpet, her clothes, and her lady-like behavior.

And in an effort to protect those things, we destroy the essence of childhood:

- Exploration
- Discovery
- Learning
- Making messes
- Mistakes
- Progress

Those aren't just the essence of childhood, they are essence of life itself. And my desire to protect her from a mess and protect our precious carpet could have taken all of those away.

The Words No Parent Should Say

Years ago, I swore I would never make that mistake.

One night I caught myself telling Aracelli to "not make a mess" as she was washing her hands. I realized in that moment how horrible those words are.

She was just learning to wash her hands and I was worried about what? A little water on the floor?

In effect, what I was saying to her was:

- "Never try something that's hard."
- "Stick to what you know."
- "Be afraid to fail."
- "Stay in your comfort zone."

• "Don't try to do things on your own."

I decided in that moment that I would never tell Aracelli to not make a mess again. Messes are a part of learning. Messes are a part of life.

Embrace the Messes

Instead of discouraging our kids (or our employees or friends) from making messes, we should encourage them to do so. For it is in the messiness of life that we learn the most. It's in the messes of life that accidental discoveries suddenly come into view. It's in the messes that greatness is unleashed, leaders are made, and the world is changed.

Are you afraid to get dirty? Are you scared of making mistakes? Does fear hold you back from exploring...and ultimately discovering something great about the world and about yourself?

My Email to Our Daughter - Get Messy

Perhaps you need to hear the words I wrote to Aracelli the next day. They apply to you. They apply to all of us. For when we no longer fear failure and embrace the messiness, we find true greatness.

Hey Sweetie,

Yesterday I got mad at you for having dirty hands from playing in the mud. That was wrong of me. Thank you for forgiving me last night.

Don't ever be afraid to play in the mud.

Don't ever be afraid to get your hands dirty.

Don't ever be afraid to have fun.

Don't ever be afraid to be creative, even if others think it's crazy.

Don't ever be afraid to play.

Life will sometimes tell you that to be successful you have to be serious. That is a lie.

God wants you to have fun. To play. To enjoy life.

Others will say:

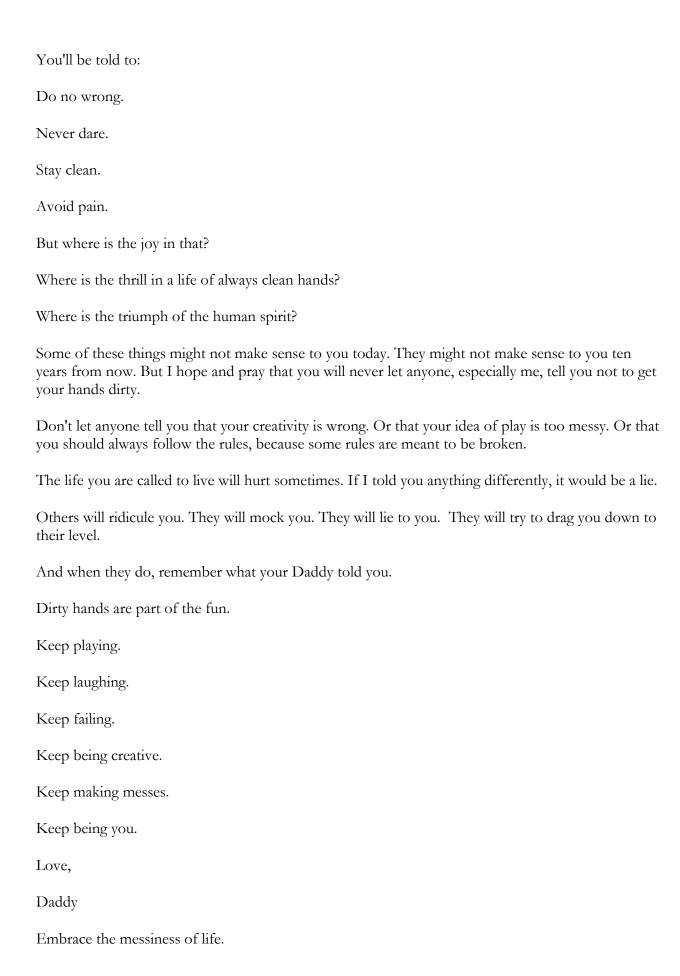
"Follow the rules."

"Keep your head down."

"Don't speak up or stand out."

"Don't get your hands dirty."

Life might be easier that way. It might be less painful at times. It might even feel successful.



Embrace it at home. Embrace it at work. Embrace it when you are looking for an elusive parking spot. Embrace it everywhere.

Keep making messes.

Keep being you.

What mess are you glad you've made in life?