

Childism as a Missed Opportunity



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“Living with Wild Abandon” is an original bi-weekly column appearing sporadically on Tuesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Breezy V. Stevens. Breezy is a long-time radical unschooler, an advocate for children’s rights, a crazy dog lady, a crafter in various mediums, a lover of all things tropical and beachy, and the designer of “EVC in Color”. Archived columns can be found [here](#). LWA-only RSS feed available [here](#).

When I’m out in public places, I see an awful lot of instances of people treating their children rudely and disrespectfully. Sometimes they’re just flat-out mean. Every time I see it, it breaks my heart, and it’s easy to get stuck in the thinking that the world will never come around to kinder ways of living with children.

Occasionally, though, I witness an adult-child interaction that warms my heart and gives me hope. Recently I was at the post office, in an awful hurry. I came rushing out toward my car, noticing that the door of the car next to mine was open, preventing me from reaching the driver’s seat.

Just as I started to get irritated that I would be delayed, I noticed the people behind the open door – an older woman and what was presumably her young grandson. The woman was carefully unpacking the box she’d just received, in order to pull out a big air bubble packing cushion. She handed it to the boy, all the while talking kindly and attentively with him.

Seeing this, I relaxed, remembering all the times I’d paused in the middle of my busy day to talk and play with my wee ones, and wishing dearly that more people were able to push aside their busy-ness and impatience, and spend more moments connecting with their kids. Instead of pushing past them to my car, I hung back and watched.

I watched as the grandmother handed the cushion to the boy, took his hand, and walked with him to the sidewalk. I watched as he placed the bubble on the ground and tried to stomp on it. It skipped out from under his feet, and grandma smiled, patiently placing it back in position for another try. Their car door was closed now, and I’d been spotted, so I continued to my own car and got in. As I slowly drove away, I continued to watch them.

The last thing I saw was the grandmother look up, as an airplane flew overhead. She

pointed it out gleefully to the little boy, and his eyes grew wide as he watched and listened to her words. There was a palpable air around them, of love and joy in each other's company. The grandmother had taken what could have been just another boring errand, and made it into an adventure.

I drove home in a wonderful mood, feeling that I'd just witnessed a small miracle. And I wondered to myself why this is a comparatively rare occurrence in our current culture. I remember when my own children were young, the way their wonder was infectious. Being home with them was a shockingly rejuvenating experience, as my own eyes were reopened to the almost magical possibilities that lurked in everyday experiences, most of which had long since become boring and routine. Living moment-to-moment in the presence of small children allowed me to be more present, to notice so many of the fine details of life and the world around me that I'd unconsciously learned to tune out as I'd grown older. Their relentless energy and enthusiasm, while at times overwhelming or even exhausting, changed and renewed my overall outlook on the world and humanity. I feel blessed that I was able to witness and participate in so much of my children's childhood. Now that my kids are so much older (one grown, and the other a teenager), the energy and enthusiasm is less apparent. Small things are no longer new and exciting. I find myself missing the moments of awe at "the little things": the first fall leaves and snowfall; the excitement of running from frozen puddle to frozen puddle, relishing the crunch of the ice as we jumped onto it with all our might; bending low to examine an insect we'd never seen before; staying in the warm house on a cold winter day, doing science experiments, or baking something wonderful... it's a list I could add to all day. And though we don't really do these things anymore, we will always have these memories to cherish, and hopefully, my own children will endeavor to fully engage with their children as well.

These kinds of experiences, I believe, are not only foundational to the children we share them with, but also transformative for the adults that share the childhood adventures. We are given an opportunity to see the world through children's eyes again, and if we embrace the opportunity, we are the recipients of great and lasting gifts that can remind us to see the world with an outlook of innocence and wonder.

It's a profoundly sad thing, to see so many people missing such an amazing opportunity, as they brush aside their children's questions, hurry them from one "important" errand to another, and shush or shame them (or worse) when they disrupt the ingrained busy-ness of the adults around them. What could be more important than to savor every moment, and every experience with these precious, amazing tiny people, as they learn to navigate the world around them? Being present with our children, paying attention and taking them seriously, and allowing them to act like the children they are - even in public - has the potential to contribute to a radical change in the way our culture treats children. I worry about the consequences of locking children away from the rest of the world, for their own

sake, as well as for adults' sake. We all miss out on mutually beneficial interactions, to everyone's detriment. I believe the world would be a better, happier, more compassionate place to live if people of all ages were free to mingle, to work, to play, to explore and investigate, and to share companionship together, in our daily lives. This will, of course, require some attitude adjustments from adults, both in our philosophical beliefs about children's rights and place in the world, as well as in our day-to-day interactions with them: it's all well and good to *believe* that children should be treated equally and with respect, but we have to learn to live this belief, every day.

In our crazy, busy, stressed-out world, more of us are finding that we need to slow down and connect with the truly important things in life. It's easy for life to become a blur, to get stuck in a rut, to lose touch with our values and forget to see the wonderful-ness in the world around us. I think including and connecting with kids again is likely to do everyone more good than we can even imagine.

I am heartened each time I see someone like the grandmother from last week, taking the time and energy to enjoy and appreciate the small moments with children. More and more people seem to be embracing a new way of living with children every day, and I am hopeful and grateful for each and every one.