

Embracing the Moment



Send him mail.

“One Improved Unit” is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OIU-only RSS feed available here.

I have recently discovered a major weakness of mine. I have heretofore been aware of it, but justified it on the grounds that I wasn't doing anything wrong. I can no longer lie complacent to this sin and allow my family to suffer its consequences. Mine is the sin of *distraction*.

How My Children Suffer

A major component of the practice of unschooling is facilitating your children's learning. And since learning is as natural (and as often) as breathing, an unschooling parent must be ready and willing to be their children's constant companion through the journey of life. Part and parcel with this companionship, then, is the desire and ability to maintain complete and undivided attention on whatever it is your child needs you for. A recent example follows.

I took my family to a mall in the heart of downtown Salt Lake City last Friday for lunch. We arrived from an exciting museum of ancient life about 30 miles south. We chose this mall to dine because they have a large and fascinating dinosaur-themed play area for children of all ages. It's one of my children's favorite places to eat for that reason. After our meal, my 3-year-old daughter insisted that I play hide-and-seek with her. After a few rounds, I began to pull my cell phone out and thumb through my blog feeds while I counted, or while she was looking for me. I figured that I might as well be productive whilst playing with my daughter. At one point, it was my turn to count, and her turn to hide. While counting, I began thumbing through my phone and discovered an interesting post and proceeded to read it. Before I knew it, a few minutes had passed and I remembered that I was supposed to be looking for my daughter.

Talk about disrespect. My actions were inexcusable. In that moment, I failed as a father. My wife told me later that evening that my daughter came to her wondering where I was and why I wasn't trying to find her. The realization of my failure broke my heart. I apologized to

her forthwith, and she compassionately forgave me. This wasn't the first time something like this has happened. My cell phone often serves as a distraction to me. Just ask my wife.

How My Wife Suffers

As the breadwinner, I go to work during the day and my wife stays home with our children. Unschooling has been a real challenge for her. She's slowly learning to embrace it. It's my job as the one converted to the unschooling philosophy to demonstrate to her my willingness to practice it. My kids are a real handful, and the days are long. Further, my wife insists on keeping a clean house and preparing a warm dinner. In short, by the time I come home, she's beat. Now, my job is fairly stress free because computers come naturally to me (software quality assurance engineer). I like to relax and kick my feet up when I come home from work, but I would be lying if I said I was tired. (Of course, some days I am, but most days I'm not.)

Now unless I spend a minute or two preparing myself to be in whatever moment my wife or kids need me in before I enter our home, its easy for me to project my stress-free state onto my wife. More often than not this is a big mistake. If I don't connect with my wife's condition, its likely that I will miss something important from her that I don't want to miss. Usually this means failing to recognize the day she's been through, and providing her needed support. It also means failing to approach our kids in a "dad is here so let's let mom punch-out" attitude. And when I fail to do that, conflicts are sure to ensue. Why? Because failing these, dad thinks everything is hunky-dory and proceeds to lose himself in the television, computer, or his phone. What this tells me wife should be obvious (to those more enlightened than I).

Final Thoughts

Every time this series is due for a new column, I wonder about what I could possibly need to write on. I'm perfect, after all. But sure enough, something smacks me across the face and some serious reflection is needed in order to shape up and improve. Without a doubt I will have something to explore in the coming weeks, but the important thing is that I don't let it or anything else become a distraction from the one's I love the most. Moments can be fleeting if they are not embraced. Don't let those moments be something you'll regret missing.