

See for Yourself

By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog

Have you ever stepped in dog poop, and even though there was little doubt that's what it was, sniffed your shoe just to be sure?

What compels some of us to see, hear, taste, smell for ourselves to be completely convinced? Seems disgust may not always be a deterrent to the see-for-yourselfer, but you'd think the threat of danger would be. The Darwin Awards—acknowledging the stupidest ways that people have inadvertently killed themselves—prove otherwise.

Speaking of...

When one of my husband's tried-and-true green cleaning techniques unexpectedly backfired, a mix of glass shards, boiling water, baking soda, and macaroni & cheese bits simultaneously made a daunting pool on the stove and peppered everything within a 5-foot radius.

Nearly 2 person-hours into the cleanup, while sponging one particularly tricky corner and holding both the handle of the oven and a butter knife (don't ask), I felt electrical current skitter up my arms. Nothing too strong, but enough to make me let out a little yelp and step back. Did I really feel what I think I felt?

I mentioned it to my husband, and after passing consideration, we both promptly resumed Operation Use Harsh Chemicals Next Time. It wasn't long before I sponged over the hot spot again and got another little jolt. How did my husband test my claim? By touching it himself, not once, but twice, just to be sure. Shouldn't rogue electricity have been convincing enough the first time?

I probably don't have to go out on a distant limb of the family tree to figure out where my 8-year-old son gets his skeptical nature. I couldn't begin to count the number of times he has disputed something I've said. No expression of certainty on my part convinces him. He's not taking my word for it. No, I've got to prove it.

There are times when he's oppositional just for the sake of it. That's possibly another family trait, or hopefully, more of a developmental stage. But the questioning I'm talking about is different. He really believes I'm wrong, or at least doubts that I'm right, and I don't think he's just trying to be a pest when he asks to see for himself.

I'm glad for my son's healthy skepticism. I hope it's a foil to future gullibility, passivity, intellectual laziness, and a tendency to mindlessly follow the crowd...seeing for yourself means you're not letting others see and say for you.

While he's still relatively little, all his questions don't make for such a heavy burden of proof. In fact, they can lead to some pretty lively conversations and joint mini-research projects. I know the day will come when his questions are the kind he won't look to me to help answer. For now, it's a kind of luxury to prove things together.

As for those Darwin Awards, I'm not worried about my son's candidacy (parental disregard for impending electrocution aside). I suspect some of the Darwin Award winners do come from the pool of more hands-on, experiential see-for-yourselfers, but from a subset that is also missing some vital complementary skills such as assessing risk and thinking all the way through a plan before executing it (and themselves).

Seeing for yourself shouldn't be a perilous experiment. Jumping in with both feet to prove something—short of plunging to your actual death—is a good thing.

Yes, kids, you can try this at home!