

Chuns of Fun

By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog

My husband barely has the words out of his mouth—a request to take out the compost or recycling, bike to the library to return books, go to Home Depot for some light bulbs—when my 8-year-old son assumes a posture of abject misery, his eyes welling with giant tears.

What is it about spending time doing simple, helpful chores upon request that kids hate so much? Okay, admittedly, none of us is too excited about the routine tasks of daily living with their endless-loop quality—done and undone, done and undone, done and undone—but that’s life, right? Learning how to make the best of it—even to the point of enjoying the effort of work independent of the transient results—is a really useful skill. Maybe it’s even more accurately described as a point-of-view: not just the way we do what has to be done, but the way we see and experience it, too. You know, a kind of Zen and the art of daily living.

The funny thing is, once my son is doing the chore—or chun (for “fun chore!”), as we like to call it—the Zen kicks in naturally and he is perfectly happy. The excuses (“I’m eating...sleeping...in the bathroom...I feel sick...tired...nauseated...”) fall away, the hunched shoulders straighten, the tears dry, and he does the chun with satisfaction and a certain amount of pleasure.

While my husband handily weathers the inevitable pre-chun storm—he’s visibly unimpressed—I seem to think that if we make the request with more warning, say it less bluntly, position it more attractively, we can sell it without incident. (Sell it without incident?! When did my kids become my customers?)

My husband is also much better at accepting the mess and inefficiencies that come with letting kids do things. It’s called learning, and I recognize my aversions to conflict and disorder shouldn’t stand in its way. Of course, that recognition doesn’t always stop me from doing it myself anyway because it’s faster, easier, and neater.

Then I fast-forward in my order-loving head to my kids as young adults who don’t know how to make a meal, do the laundry, take care of an apartment, pay their bills...these are chastening images. Chuns are an important part of the road to competence and self-reliance. It’s part of my job as a parent to give my kids the experiences that will help them become future responsible adults.

Seems I may be the one hawking Zen and the art of daily living (see my previous experience in sales noted above), but my husband is living it. This aspect of parenting is more chun than chore for him, done with purpose and pleasure. Looks like it’s my turn to put my excuses aside, straighten my shoulders, dry my tears, and make the best of it.