

## THE VALUE OF CHILDREN

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[Assignment: Sometimes we learn important lessons from the most unlikely sources. Describe an experience which taught you a surprising lesson.]

Being a nanny for the three most undisciplined children in the world did not excite me. I agonized for a week about whether or not I should accept the Dilla's summer job offer. Finally, I accepted because after all, money talks.

The first day was hellish. Theodore Robert, William Joseph, and Elizabeth (commonly known as T.R., B.J., and Betsy) immediately put me to the test. B.J. refused to eat the peanut butter and jelly sandwich I fixed him because I cut it in half diagonally, which was totally unacceptable to him. He stated that he would force himself to throw up if I did not fix him something else to eat. I refused; he threw up. The blueberry yogurt and toast he ate for breakfast became a lasting stain on my new white KEDS.

The nightmare continued with T.R., the oldest, constantly needing my complete attention. Whenever I was not driving him to and from swim lessons, soccer practice, piano lessons, or T-ball games, he insisted that I play catch with him. I hate playing catch. I hate ALL sports. After 30 minutes of exhausting play, my shoulder ached, and I could feel the sweat dripping down my back. I felt a nanny had important obligations and responsibilities of child care with little time to waste playing catch with an eight-year-old.

Then there was four-year-old Betsy. Everyday when I walked up the stone path to the Dilla house, Betsy greeted me by chanting the phrase, "I hate Cole!" (The kids referred to me by this name.) Even if I was in a good mood when I arrived at the Dilla's, it proved difficult to maintain my sanity for long with T.R., B.J., and Betsy constantly under my supervision.

The days seemed to run together, and I grew restless for summer to end after only my first week. As far as I was concerned, children, especially the Dilla's, were nothing but little talking objects I was in charge of for six hours a day. I would get so irritated over common incidents that my anger prevented me from relaxing and enjoying the children. I would become grouchy and disturbed every time T.R. got dirty, B.J. let "fire-butt bugs" (lightning bugs) in the house, or Betsy wet her pants.

One day I took the kids to a place called Kaufmann Lake where we could feed ducks. Naturally, I became hysterical when the kids got mud on their clean shoes. When I finished my speech about how mud is disgusting and I did not want filth and germs all over my car, B.J. looked up at me and said, "Lighten up, Cole. It's fun to get muddy." Hearing that statement

from a six-year-old made me stop and think that maybe he had a point. I quickly apologized to the kids for overreacting, and they asked me to take off my shoes and socks. I did so with a mixture of fear and excitement. T.R., B.J., and Betsy showed me how to dig deep down in the mud with my toes and how to make monster designs with footprints. Yes, my feet felt slimy and my car ended up being stained, but I can honestly say I had fun that day.

About a week later, the kids asked to go to a park near their house. As we grew closer to the park, B.J., who had memorized the names of all the flowers and trees near his house, pointed out some "beautiful" tulips. The kids and I gathered around them to take a closer look. Betsy liked the soft yellows and pinks, while B.J. and I preferred the bright reds and oranges. The beauty of the flowers seemed to reflect the beauty of the day. I thought to myself that it was like a picture straight out of a children's storybook. I found it amazing that I had been to that park countless times, but I had never noticed all the beautiful things in nature it contained.

Toward the end of the summer, I still considered the children dirty, smelly, whiny, and bratty, but now I also knew they were silly, inquisitive, and responsive. I continued to feel annoyed with some of their actions. For example, the high pitched screams and laughter that emerged from the children while watching television sent chills of aggravation down my spine. Once I took the time to watch what the children found so amusing, I heard myself laughing with them. Through all of my sessions of catch with T. R., he never caught a ball. Finally, on my last day, he caught a fly ball. I am not sure who was more excited to hear the smack of the ball hitting the mitt, me or T.R.. His blue eyes were wide with amazement as I ran over to give him a hug. Like most eight-year-old boys, he shrugged out of my reach and extended his arm for a high-five instead. I did not think it was possible to feel close to a child, but I knew I made a connection with T.R.. I wondered how the other children felt, and I found out later that day when Betsy said, "I love you, Cole."