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Opinion

» The Mummy Chronicles

Never a dull day with my son



BY TAN KENG YAO

RECENTLY, my five-year-old son was playing quietly by himself when he suddenly burst into noisy tears.

I was alarmed. What could have happened to make him cry out suddenly like that?

After much probing (Did he see a ghost? Was he suffering from a sudden debilitating pain? Did he have a flashback of me eating up all his ice cream when he was two years old?), he revealed in between gulpy sobs and choked-up words that he had swallowed a sago seed.

He refused to say why he swallowed it. I would like to think it was done in the spirit of scientific inquiry, and that he was doing an investigative study on the effects of peptic enzymes on foreign objects in the human gastrointestinal system. But I think it's more like he had, what we would say colloquially, an itchy backside.

I didn't know what one was supposed to do when one's son swallowed a sago seed, so I turned to Google.

Google told me sago seeds are poisonous. I suffered quiet panic and quickly did another search with the keywords "how many sago seeds, toxic, die".

Google was vague on this and I was wondering whether I should call poison control or whatever the Singapore equivalent is, when my common sense kicked in. I took a deep breath to clear my head, closed the browser and did the more sensible thing, which was to force-feed my son lots of prune juice.

Half an hour later, he was happily swinging his legs over the porcelain throne and poring over his favourite picture book while on it.

He is still alive today, so all is well and I have learnt something: Swallowing one sago seed is not a leading

cause of poisoning in children.

But it is possible that this incident shaved five years off my life through the life-shortening effects of acute panic.

Ah, the joys of motherhood.

The books I used to embrace, the What To Expect series and the Dr Sears childcare books, are all missing one chapter: Parenthood Is Crazy; Good Luck To You, You Need It.

Before the boy came along, my life was a constant, people in my world behaved rationally and there was order in the universe.

And then my son happened – now I feel like I'm on a roller-coaster ride in which I'm blindfolded because I am not sure what scrapes the boy will get into next.

Some are anxiety-provoking, like the time he got his finger caught in playground equipment and required stitches. Some are teeth-gritting, like when he threw up four times in one night, vomiting each time after I'd changed him into clean clothes and showered him.

And some are downright annoying, like the case of the apple in the toilet bowl which I would rather not talk about right now, except that no one wanted to eat the apple after that even though I offered to scrub it really well.

But then there are the aww-inducing moments, like when we cuddle in his bed before he goes to sleep, or when he shouts "I love you, mummy!" through the door after I leave his bedroom for the night.

And herein lies the contradiction of life, in which bad things come bundled with the good and neither exists on its own.

This is not only because the existence of good things can take the sting out of the bad, but also, without the crummy moments to provide a contrast with the sweet ones, the sweet moments might not quite seem as endearing.

If my son didn't spend his days getting into scrapes, he might not appear quite as angel-like when he's deep in slumber, and looking so serene that I feel compelled to stroke his soft cheek and think: "He's really not so bad when he's sleeping."

And while some quiet, peaceful days* would be good, life would get boring really fast if all my son did was to kiss me on the face, sing cute nursery rhymes and draw pictures of puppies and rainbows.

You could say my son keeps my life very exciting indeed.

And maybe one day, I'll be able to look back on all these scrapes and laugh about them. Probably when my son has his own children, and they do to him what he has done to me.

* unless the quiet, peaceful moments mean the boy is up to some really really terrible mischief that keeps him so occupied he forgets to be noisy

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