

## My Parenting Reality...

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When children are born we want nothing more than to know they are healthy and happy. To us, those little bundles are the picture of perfection. So when something comes along that compromises or questions all we anticipated about this baby our world –for a time- can seem like it's falling apart.

When my youngest was born he underwent a surgery where we discovered he had a condition called Microphthalmia with Persistent Fetal Vasculature Syndrome. Basically his right eye did not fully develop in the womb and as a result he was blind. While we were relieved that this

condition only effected one eye, we were confused about what the future would hold for our tiny little boy- who my oldest, upon hearing of this condition, began calling his baby brother Popeye.

We listened to the doctors and followed all the steps that needed to be taken to ensure our little guy would have a normal life. One of those steps is he had to be fitted for and wear a prosthetic eye. The only thing he couldn't do, they said, was "fly an airplane." Of course as soon as I heard those words I could only think, "Oh yes he can. What does the FAA know anyway?!"

Since my husband and I didn't know what to expect from this condition every milestone was reason to celebrate. We held our breath until he crawled, until he walked, until he talked. It was when he repeated an expletive he overheard we realized he was progressing just fine. So we stopped holding our breath and just enjoyed watching our little one-eyed wonder boy grow up.

I mentally prepared for the day when he would ask me why he was different. And when I say I mentally prepared for it I mean I cried, ate chocolate and cried a little more. Then one day he did. I could have told him how it was unfair, how for a time I was mad at God for letting this happen, how I blamed myself, how we want to take away every bit of pain and embarrassment he might feel someday and replace it with self confidence and courage. But I didn't. I said a quick prayer- the kind where you ask for words of wisdom- and began telling him the same thing my parents told me when I complained about having freckles and big lips. "You are just the way you were meant to be. Any other way and you wouldn't be Jackson." He looked at me and responded, "who would I be then?"

We have a little fun with this reality too though. My oldest had a friend over to play once and Jackson's eye began to bother him. When this happens we have to take the eye out. After I took it out, I noticed the friend looking at me with fear in his eyes- no pun intended. I began to walk out of the room but before I did I turned to this stunned little boy and said, "That's what happens when you don't listen to at our house." He hasn't been back to play since.

The point is this. No one's perfect, including our children. But it's our job to make them feel special and wanted and needed in this world no matter what. Because someday they may decide to take on this job we call parenting. When they do we have to be there to encourage them and let them know that it's the jobs we never knew we wanted that we find out we're the best at.

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