**Friday, May 03, 2013 -** **No More**

We forget the little things.

I sometimes feel an inordinate amount of panic when I think of all those really good moments that have escaped into the deep dark abyss of a perpetually overloaded Mommy brain. I used to try to chronicle everything. But it's impossible. There is too much.

The sigh gulp, sigh gulp cadence of a nursing baby at your breast. The smell of diaper cream and baby lotion that permeates everything. The sweet ache of holding a sleeping child in your arms and how profound the trust that makes such a thing possible. The sheer delight on a toddler's face when he knocks down the tower of blocks. The way that never gets old or any less thrilling. How a storybook is just as captivating the hundredth time as it was the first. How fiercely little arms can cling. How deeply and unconditionally little hearts can love.

But there are things that stand out in my memory with such stark clarity that I will never forget, even when my babies are grizzled old men with histories independent of the one I have written for them.

Bloody t-shirt day was one of those.

There had been signs.

Repeated indignant calls from the P.E. teacher reporting that my son would not dress out for gym. I didn't find that alarming. He was a pudgy kid who had been incessantly bullied. Why on earth would he make himself so vulnerable as to expose to the world a body he had learned to loathe?

My kitchen shears disappeared. But there are always projects and cutting implements are in high demand when resources are shared. They bounce around from room to room and almost never reside in their rightful place.

Holes appeared in the cuffs of long sleeved shirts, through which to loop thumbs. As a child of the eighties, I knew full well that fashion trends are often quite bizarre and arbitrary, so again, I didn't question. WE wore our clothing backwards for heaven's sake.

He began to eschew no show socks and opted for crew length instead. I didn't realize that socks held such significance. If there's anything that you take from this, make it that. Socks matter.

The bloody t-shirt though....that I couldn't deny.

I was in an irritated frenzy, pawing through books and DVD cases and crumpled clothing and empty chip bags and (dear God what IS that??? ) dirty underwear looking for a library book that had been missing for ages and for which we had now been assessed a replacement fee. I had worked up a full head of annoyed steam about the mess and the book. I muttered to myself and mentally drafted the dialogue we would have later.

From beneath the bed I pulled something stiff and brown.

At first I was confused. It didn't feel or look like any article of clothing that he owned. It was clearly a garment of some kind, but why the odd color? Why the strange texture? Why the....SMELL???

The odor that reached my nose carried the stink of truth.

Fresh meat.

Death.

BLOOD.

*Ohmygoditscoveredinblood. Heshurtheshurtheshurt. Lotsandlotsandlotsofblood.*

From my baby. From my baby. From. My. BABY.

I knew then. The suspicion that had been slowly germinating suddenly bloomed into full awareness along with the real scope of the problem. This was serious. There was a lot of blood and it was no small injury he was inflicting upon himself.

*Dear God WHY??? Why??? Why, why, why, why, why?*

I sank to ground amid the mess; crumpling papers, cracking cases and snapping pencils, not caring at all as I sobbed into that disgusting shirt. My tears mixed with the blood, which stained my hands an aged and putrid crimson. It was horrifying. Utterly, completely, inconceivably horrifying.

Those were very dark days. I can't even begin to describe the depth of despair, both his and ours. He was angry, ashamed and belligerent. We were terrified, confused and desperate.

I knew he wasn't trying to kill himself, only replace one kind of pain with another. But I feared he would one day cut too deeply and do too much damage. I feared finding him dead, his rich red blood pooled around him like a superhero cape; Captain Exsanguination lying in my son's bed.

I tried to hide anything that would penetrate flesh. But addiction and need spawn ingenuity and stealth. It was a wholly fruitless endeavor. The powerlessness was profound and paralyzing. I could not fix this. I could not heal the wounds on his body or the ones in his heart. I could not ease the torment in his brain. I could do *nothing*.
I needed people more knowledgeable than myself to deal with this. I had to trust the care of my child to people who knew nothing about him, other than what it said in his case history. I had to relinquish control and have faith, neither of which come very easily to me. But I had no choice and neither did he. He screamed and begged and raged, his tears both defiant and pleading.

"You don't care about me. You just want me out of the way. You can't make me. I hate you."

Then...

"Please don't make me go. I'm not crazy. I won't do it again. I love you."

I had to turn a deaf ear to the pleas of my child.

Think about that for a minute.

You can't even imagine a moment like that until you are in it. Every part of you that is connected to your child; heart, mind, body, and soul, compels you to do whatever it takes to stop the tears, ease the pain, offer comfort and provide protection...from the very thing that he needs to get well. You have to TURN OFF the part of you that makes you a mother and make decisions using only logic and reason.

Once, naively, I thought pushing his body from mine was the hardest thing I had ever done or ever would do.

I was wrong.

13 months have passed since he last hurt himself, something he is very proud of. He has worked hard to overcome his compulsion. He has developed tools to cope with the bad feelings. He has been committed to using them. He is getting stronger.

But he is not better.

Last night, as I lay in bed, nearly comatose with exhaustion but as yet unable to quiet my thoughts enough to sleep, there was a knock at the door.

I did not look up as my son entered.

"What is it?" I asked wearily.

"Mom, I fucked up. Help."

That got my attention.

I looked up to see him holding his wrist in one hand, blood dripping from beneath his clenched fingers.

*Calm, be calm, don't freak out, don't freak out.*

"Well, let me see."

I set about the business of assessing the damage and dressing the wound. I was very matter of fact. He was mostly silent.

*Only one cut. Not too deep. He stopped. He stopped. He stopped.*

"Do you want to talk about it"?

He did. No more secrets, no more lies, no more shame.

No more bloody t-shirt days.

(Addendum: (not quite so) Diminutive One has read this piece and given his approval for me to post, which, in my opinion, makes him one of the bravest people I know. He wants to raise awareness and get people talking about self harm. We hope this post will help. He also wanted me to mention that the incident that prompted the cutting, didn't really bother him nearly so much as the cutting itself. He was angry with himself for relapsing. But he has resolved to forgive himself and determined to move forward.)

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