

MUM'S THE WORD by Alyson Hill

There is an unwritten rule when one becomes a parent, that one must never, ever say out loud how much they may hate being a parent. I know, I've seen the expressions on peoples' faces at Tupperware parties when I've inadvertently said it. As I sip my wine and smile sheepishly at their furrowed brows though, I do wonder why I can be so certainly the odd woman out in feeling this way. I'm not a hideous monster; I am by and large a normal mum...aren't I? Perhaps not. Recently I browsed a 'find-your-friends' website and was quite taken aback at the biographies of some old classmates:

"After college, I went to Uni, graduated with my Masters, travelled all over the world, met my gorgeous husband, became CEO, and then I left to have baby Kahlua-May, and now I'm home with her being a mum and I'm loving every second of it!" Really? I know that I was an underachiever at school but could it be that I'd missed the point of parenthood as well? I very enthusiastically had three kids in five years, in my mid 20's but let me tell you, although I look at them and feel my entire being swell with love (usually when they are sleeping), I'm pretty sure parenting was not a sane choice.

Curse me if you will, but there are times when I hate being a parent. I hate being 3 metres from the school when my eldest bursts into tears because he forgot the hat that I handed to him so he *wouldn't* forget it. I hate getting notes from the canteen asking me to pay money for the lunch they gave him, because I didn't make him one (tut tut, bad mother) and then I find the cheese and vegemite sandwich peeled apart and stuffed under the car seat because he wanted jam. I hate not being allowed to use the toilet by myself. I hate being asked awkward questions when I close the door: "Mum are you doing a poo or can I come in and give you a note from school? OH! And Jeremy's here to play until 5.00." Worse still if it's followed by: "Hi, Mrs Hill. Mum said could you call her when you're finished in there?"

I hate being a parent when one of the kids gives me a chewed-up, spat-out piece of food to put on the edge of my plate, only to discover at the end of the meal, that I've eaten it. I hate that I've become blasé about pinching the kids' snot from their noses, with my bare fingers and wiping it on the grass (or worse, don't ask) when I've run out of tissues. I hate finding out that the babysitter has fed the baby sultanas for dinner, when they explosively reappear at 4am, hydrated back to full sized grapes.

I hate playing Thomas the Tank Snap 27 times in a row with a four year old who gives me the engine stats of every single card, every single time and cheats! I hate it when my toddler waits until the checkout line to loudly say the swear word she heard in the car park (possibly from me when I missed that car space near the door). In fact, I hate being a parent ANY time I am in the supermarket with my offspring. I hate putting the baby down for a sleep and listening to her yelling at me from her cot until she falls asleep 5 minutes before pick up time at the school. I hate that after waking her we are all in for a very loud and teary evening until she goes back to bed after dinner and I get to have another glass of wine. And I hate finding Playdough sweating in my bed when it is way past my bedtime.

And that's only the tip of the iceberg (the newborn months were revolting and my body will apparently never forgive me). But, reader, if you have not turned away nauseated or sucking your teeth at me, then to you I say this: I love, love, love and adore my children but I do occasionally hate being the person who is so incredibly, immensely responsible for them and I hate that there seems to be a universal expectation that this is an entirely loveable and joyful role to immerse oneself in. It is not. It can be smelly and yucky. It can be embarrassing, frightening and, yes, it can be dull. But that's OK because I have learned how important it is that I give myself permission to say that parenting, as a career choice can be very ordinary.

Don't you think it would be a relief to discover that the 'Perfect Mum' at your kids' school/playgroup yells hysterically in the car sometimes, wearing her trackie pants with the Vegemite finger-paint and Weetbix in her hair? Even if you only saw her like this one time? The perfect parent is a myth, one that causes a lot of trouble. I think if we can believe that it is hard for all of us sometimes, then we don't have to torture ourselves for not *loving...every... second*.

And if none of this strikes a chord with you reader, then think of me. I'm the one with something weird and white on her bottom, her hair stuck up at the back and bags under her eyes smiling while her daughter scrapes chewing gum off the floor out of reach, on the other side of the checkout. I'm muttering something. Can you hear me?

"This too shall pass."

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