

Dear Trajan's Second Grade Teacher,

I appreciate your "call to arms". I am a fan of being prepared. And if not prepared, then at least READY.

My son, Trajan, has a lot of me in him. The homework procrastination, the quick tears when he's tired or embarrassed, the feeling of not being good enough, and the frustration when he doesn't understand something or get it the first time... All me. His talent for sports he gets from his dad. Trajan plays a lot of baseball with his dad. Trajan sees it as torture about half of the time (less and less the older he gets), but when they're both having fun, it's magical.

After one particularly difficult session, Daddy stormed into the house and Trajan was sitting tearfully on the deck. I was rocking in the porch swing and called him over to sit next to me.

"Why does Daddy get so mad?" he asked.

"Daddy gets mad when you don't listen to him. So do I. Daddy is telling you the right thing to do and you're not listening. AND you're doing the exact opposite because you're upset that he's upset."

"Why do we have to play baseball so much?"

"Because Daddy is trying to teach you to be tough. There's easy ways of learning how to be tough and there's hard ways of learning how to be tough. Daddy picked the most fun way to teach you."

"Why do I need to learn how to be tough?"

"Because if you're tough – There's 2 kinds of tough. Physically, with your muscles; and mentally, with your brain. Mentally tough people can handle anything that comes their way. Life isn't fair. Sometimes it really sucks. But if you're mentally tough, then you can handle it better than most would and you'll get through it faster. That's called resilience.

"There's other ways of getting tough; Daddy picked the easiest."

"What other ways are there?" (*sniffle*) "I want to learn THAT way instead of baseball."

"No you don't. Believe me, the people out there learning how to be tough who aren't playing baseball WISH they were playing baseball!"

"Well, I still want to learn the other way! How to you do it?"

"You don't. Things happen TO you. People you love die. You lose things that are important to you; things you can't get back. When those things happen and you're not tough mentally, you don't want to get out of bed. You don't want to face the day. You don't know how you're going to move on. But tough people do. They get out of bed, face the day and move forward.

"Personally, I'd rather play baseball. What do you think?"

"Baseball."

I think we raise our kids based on the things we despised about our own childhoods. I despised being ignored when I asked a question and I despised feeling like my opinion didn't matter and I despised not being told the whole story. To this day, my perception of my childhood is filled with holes and patched together with lies because my parents kept so much of what was going on from me. Now I ask them about things and they can't recall.

I've always tried to keep Trajan involved in even the minor decisions of our day. Like deciding what's for dinner. Or talking out a problem with him (I have 3 things I need to do, but only have time to do 1; he helps me pick which one to do today and why). It's made him a good thinker, but kind of manipulative when it comes to what he wants for dinner.

We've experienced some difficult conversations because of that, as well. As a positive result, though, he does have a very kind heart. He will frequently bring money into IGA and if I don't let him get a toy from their coin vending machines, then he would put it in the Humane Society donation box in the checkout line.

He's a great big brother to his sister Tallyn. She just turned a year old in June and watches out for her all the time. He still sees her as helpless, though she's getting more competent by the day. He's my big helper. When he was at day care once, he told me the bigger kids were picking on him.

"Well, I hope you remember how that felt because one day you're going to be a big kid and you'll know what it's like to be the little kid." I don't know if he remembers that instance per se, but I remind him to always be nicer to his friends' younger siblings and to include them. He's pretty good at it; better than my husband admits to having been to his little sisters and better than my big brother was! Maybe it's cool to be a doting older sibling these days...

Trajan enjoys watching baseball on TV late at night with Daddy, asking him every question under the sun (I personally think it's a ploy to avoid bedtime, but whatever. Daddy enjoys it.) He really enjoys movies- anything Marvel. Movies are more my thing, so he'll hit me up in that direction when Daddy goes on fires or golfs when we can't go along. His favorite creative hobbies involve string, tape, and containers that hold water (he calls them "science experiments"), all of which he is banned from in my house (during the power outages almost 2 years ago, Trajan was big into Scooby-Doo, so he made a trap to catch any bad guys who would try to break into our house. Well, the lighting being what it is during an outage, Trajan caught Daddy in his traps- TWICE.)

During the school year, our biggest challenge seems to be homework. It feels like it turns into a shouting match every time. He doesn't think I know what I'm talking about, and me (with a BS and having gotten through Calculus in high school) praying I can figure out what the adding mountain means and why there's boulders on the sides. We have a dedicated "Homework Table" and started doing his homework the day it was assigned, just to get it done and out of the way. As I've said, he always wants to do it LATER until we're out of time. And sometimes he doesn't read the directions to the point where he understands them. Or he doesn't answer the question being asked. Or he doesn't answer it completely. There's been a lot of things in the past year that Daddy has had to reign me in on as, "he's being a boy. It's what boys do."

Trajan probably won't take to computers in class like a duck to water. This was intentional; we don't encourage it at home because while I'm on a computer all day for my work (digitized mapping), my husband also spends most of his time in front of a computer. Trajan will likely be on a computer the rest of his natural life. When we come home, we don't spend time on the computer unless we have to. We don't have tablets, smart phones (Trent has a flip phone for work), gaming systems, or anything of the sort. At night I read paper books and magazines, and we watch movies and sports together. I enjoy playing toys with Tallyn and REALLY enjoyed coloring and LEGOS with Trajan before Tallyn was born (choking hazards).

I've been told we're pretty hard on him. We expect him to tell the truth. We expect him to listen (this one is the tough one). We expect him to be respectful, to help out, watch out for the little [guy(s)], play fair, stick up for yourself, and brush/ floss/ and rinse every night. Personally, I don't think that's too much to ask. Trent and I despise the entitled attitude we see in almost every kid/ young adult alive. We both value hard work and anything worth doing is worth doing well. We value working up through the system, not being granted a position at the top. We value earning what you have, not having it be given to you. I am a believer in asking for help when you need it and paying it forward. We try to pray together every night and we try to eat from all of the food groups every day. I believe a positive attitude can get you through the day, but being practical and prepared will get you home at night.

Well, this was MOSTLY about Trajan... but probably all useful in understanding where he's coming from and going home to. Good luck this year!

~Trajan's Mom