

Once upon a time, a feisty 5-year-old was the Queen of Sleepytime Procrastination. Naps were a thing of the past; so was peace wherever she went. Her over-tiredness resulted in non-stop talking, shouting matches, and the complete inability to listen, understand, reason, and do what is asked. The Queen besieged our house over Christmas break. It was a dark time for all those in the kingdom.

After the Queen's dinner one night, she was asked to put her clean clothes from the pile on the floor into her dresser in the right drawers for each item. The Royal Chef (and Chambermaid, Dog-Walker, and Bottle-Washer) had finished in the kitchen for the night and was trying to converse with her mother in another far-away kingdom when the Queen entered and began tormenting the Royal puppy. Sent back to her chambers several times, and even asked to help the Royal Chef out by sweeping the kitchen floor, the Queen would have no part in any chores. She taunted the puppy with the broom. Finally, the Royal Chef had enough. She reluctantly ended the conversation with her mother and sent the Queen upstairs to get ready for bed. Moments later, the Royal Chef-turned-Chambermaid got a call from her father regarding their royal Christmas. They were having an excellent discussion about the impromptu dialog of football announcers when the unexpected occurs, when the Queen kept interrupting by doing things that weren't safe like crawling under nightstands with electrical cords, running in the bathroom, and jumping on the stairs. When the Chambermaid got so worried and frustrated that the Queen would hurt herself, she ended the conversation and ordered the Queen to bed...

...where the clean laundry still sat on the floor of her royal room. Also where the Royal puppy chose to deposit a mess.

It was now almost 2 hours past the Queen's bedtime. True to her style of tyranny, a shouting-match ensued. Followed by the complete inability to listen, understand, reason, and do what was asked. The Queen sat on her floor with her clothes, crying to the point of hyperventilation because she simply didn't have the capacity to handle the tasks at hand.

After the Chambermaid collected her wits, she entered the Queen's domain. The Chambermaid sat down on the Queen's new beanbag and said very quietly, "If you don't stop crying, I'm going to leave."

"But I CAN'T!!" the Queen hiccupped.

"Yes, you can."

"You have to do the thing! The 'what's this?' game!" Since she could talk, I could quickly end her crying fits by asking her "which body part is this?" and she would have to tell me "Elbow, shoulder, knee, shin, pinky-finger, ear lobe, forehead..." (I've added more complicated ones as she gets older.) It focuses her and calms her almost instantly. But here, I had to shoot for the long game.

"Listen to me. This is something you need to start learning how to do for yourself. Someday I'm not going to be here anymore" WRONG THING TO SAY, as this started a whole new round of the crying fit. "or you're going to be alone and upset and you're going to have to calm yourself down all by yourself. How far away does Grandma Chick live?"

"A long time away."

"Yes. Grandma Chick isn't here to help me calm down when I get upset. I have to do it all by myself."

"Are you going to die?!" Oh dear.

"When we were visiting Grandma Chick, who else did we see back there?" Blank look. Bad question. We saw LOTS of folks!! "We saw MY Grandma! How old is she?"

"OLD."

"Yep. So, I still have both of my parents, and my GRANDMA. I think I've got a while here on Earth yet."

She hiccupped.

"You have to be able to go through and name all of the body parts you know."

“But I don’t know my legs very well!”

“You don’t have to. You just try to remember what you can. Or think of the words to your favorite song. Or pray. That’s actually a great way to get to sleep that I used in college. I would pray and talk to God until I fell asleep almost every night.” The Queen mulled this over.

“Now. Why are you upset?”

“Because you...”

“Nope. Try again.”

“Because the puppy...”

“Nope. Try again.” Blank stare. “Because YOU left your bedroom door open and the puppy got in here and made a mess. AND because YOU didn’t listen to me when I asked you to put your clean clothes away. YOU chose not to do what I asked and have told you several times. This is on you.”

“But the puppy...”

“Nope. Tallyn, when bad things happen- and they will- you have a choice. You can either cry about it and say, ‘Poor me!’ OR you can look everything over and make the decision to do something about it. When you came in and saw the dog mess, you could have said, ‘Well, that sucks. I guess I shouldn’t have left my door open.’ Then cleaned up the mess, and forever remember to shut your door, and then started to put your clothes away...”

“Well, I have too many clothes to fit in those drawers!”

“Do you have any idea how many kids would love to have too many clothes?? You’re so lucky to have these clothes!! We’re so lucky to have friends give us these clothes- these super nice, stylish clothes and boots and shoes! You’re one lucky girl!!” She conceded that one.

“And you like to help me, right?” Nod. “Well, you know what I want done because I tell you. Think of how much it would mean to me if you just did it the first time I asked! The FIRST TIME! Wowee!! Your brother has gotten the hang of what I ask him to do and sometimes I-“ I looked both ways and dropped my voice to a whisper, “-don’t even have to say a word. He just DOES IT.” Mind. Blown.

“Do you know why he does it?” Eyes wide, head shake. “Because it’s less hassle than hearing me yell about it and having me in mind, doing it for me instead of doing it because he HAS TO makes all the difference!” Pause to wrap her Royal brain around that.

“Do you know why I do what I do?” Head shake. “EVERY. SINGLE. THING that I do, I do for YOU, YOUR BROTHER, and YOUR DAD. You think I LIKE to spend my time cleaning and cooking and grocery shopping and paying the bills and walking the dogs and helping with homework and a full-time job? I don’t! If it were up to me, well, let’s not go there. Everything I do, I do it for you. THAT makes it worth it for me. Doing it for me isn’t enough. Cooking and cleaning so you grow up to be healthy and capable of doing whatever-it-is-that-God-needs-you-to-do? Now that’s worth it for me. THAT’S Why I Do Anything and Everything. For You.”

“Do you like it when I yell?” That was a hard “NO” headshake. “Then instead of crying about something you have to do, think of how doing it will make me feel happy! And when I’m happy that you did this super-awesome thing the first time I asked, do you know what happens then?” Slow headshake. “I. Buy. Ice Cream.”

“And you know,” while I was at it, I may as well shoot for the moon, “Letting me do things that I enjoy and being quiet or playing nicely in your room makes ME a better Mommy. Like talking on the phone to MY mom. And MY dad. They aren’t close by anymore and I don’t get to talk to them as often as I’d like. You can let that happen sometimes. Letting me read my book instead of interrupting. Letting me have some time to myself doing the things I enjoy makes me a better person for you, your brother, and your dad.”

She was starting to drift off, clearly done crying and probably overwhelmed by the long conversation. I tucked the covers in tight around her and climbed in next to her for prayers aimed at better attitudes, more sleep, patience (for me), as well as many thanks for watching over us, guiding us, protecting us, keeping us safe and in His care...

Then I trudged up the stairs and started typing out a story of an event in her childhood that she may or may not remember 25 years from now. If I'm lucky, I'll get to show this to her, reminding her to be patient with her own daughter.

(Did I say 25? Let's shoot for 30. Maybe 35.)