

Normal is as normal does...

By Chris Myrah

When I was 13 years old, my mother died unexpectedly of a brain aneurism. I was devastated. I remember the next morning; I went for a walk with my father. I remember that I asked him if life would ever be normal again. His answer has stuck with me all these years.

“Yes, Chris,” he replied. “Life will be normal. It will just be a different normal than you’ve ever known before.”

That line of thinking has helped me many times over the years. It was true. Life without my mother DID become normal. Life with twins DID become normal. Having children with disabilities DID become normal.

Normal is one of those words that has so many different connotations, and can mean so many different things to different people. What got me thinking about it was the fact that we had another Kool-Aid incident the other day. Justin tried to take a completely full one-gallon pitcher of grape Kool-Aid from the refrigerator. I was still sleeping, and I awoke to him tap-tap-tapping me on the arm.

“Mom?” he said. “Don’t kill me, okay?”

That isn’t a very pleasant way to wake up. (And I don’t know why he was worried I would kill him. I have made it abundantly clear that I only kill children on Fridays. The day was Monday, and thus he was perfectly safe.)

Justin went on to explain that while removing the GALLON of Kool-Aid from the fridge, it proved too heavy for him, and he dropped it on the floor. It had no lid on it, and grape Kool-Aid was everywhere. EVERYWHERE.

I sent Justin back upstairs, took an anxiety pill, and then called my friend M. to come and help me. If nothing else, this summer has definitely taught me what my limits are, and I knew that facing the disaster was something I wasn’t going to be able to do on my own. And a disaster it was!

The floor was a quarter-inch deep in Kool-Aid everywhere. It had run under the refrigerator and under the stove. We have a piece of baseboard missing, and Kool-Aid was ominously heading that direction, into the great unknown inside the walls. I sacrificed several towels to the floor to sop up as much as possible.

My friend came with a mop and bucket, and with her help we moved the refrigerator and the stove, cleaning the floors under both, and then, since they were out, the walls and sides as well. The floor took several moppings, which M. was kind enough to do.

So, summer has so far included (although the list is far from complete!): Allie painting the carpeting, me breaking my arm, Jim hurting his leg, Allie falling on the deck and getting road-rash, Allie forgetting the Kool-Aid and letting it overflow everywhere, and now, Justin dropping a gallon of Kool-Aid on the floor.

When talking to my dad, he asked, clearly perplexed, “Don’t you ever have a NORMAL day at your house?” He went on to say that he doesn’t remember my siblings and I ever having these sort of ‘adventures’ when we were growing up.

That question stirred my thoughts on what is normal. That long ago question asked by a grieving 13-year-old girl. The only reasonable conclusion is that yes, we DO have normal days at our house. Unfortunately (well, I guess that is a point of view), ‘normal’ at our house it to live from one catastrophe to the next.

My conclusion was proven yesterday, when in an attempt to be helpful and actually contribute to the house cleaning (broken arms are good for one thing! I got the definite light duty on chores for the summer!), I ran the dishwasher.

Unfortunately, I didn’t pay close enough attention to the fact that several of the dishes had been coated in the contents of a spilled bottle of Dawn dishwashing liquid. I just threw everything in and hit “start.” I went downstairs and came up about 10 minutes later, to the sight of a kitchen resembling a glorious bubble bath. The dishwasher was pouring copious amounts of bubbles out its bottom and sides.

I opened the door to find the inside of the dishwasher appearing completely impenetrable—bubbles everywhere! I hit “stop,” and Jim came and we used the sink hose to fill it with cold water, drain and repeat. Several times. And my kitchen floor? It has never been cleaner.

So, yes, Dad. We DO have normal days at our house. It’s just that our version of normal differs from that of most people. But between my clumsiness, constant illness, and propensity for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, Allie and Justin’s various escapades, and Jack’s never-ending mischief, I wouldn’t trade a minute of our “normal.” Life is never boring.