



### **IT'S JUST A PHASE**

*A letter from a mom of older teens to moms (and dads) of newborns to new teens who struggle with the stage or phase their kids are going through.*

You've heard the expression "It's just a phase." And it really is just a phase. Trust me. This too shall pass. So my humble advice? Don't wish it away. Embrace it. Breathe through it when it's tough. Ask for help. Scream into your pillow. Give yourself a time out. Watch a funny movie after the kids are in bed. Journal yourself to sleep. Find whatever bit of sanity you can hold onto in the moment and pat yourself on the back for conjuring up a little more patience. Then, when you wake up in the morning, realizing HOLY CRAP, I survived that shitty day - Do NOT start that familiar internal dialogue where you find every fault with what you did wrong or should have done better the day before, bashing your competence as a mother.

Instead, as cliché as it sounds, tell yourself, "Today's a new day." A fresh start to get it right. But right is relative. When you greet that child who was testing the boundaries big-time yesterday, begin with a hug and a kiss, a soft voice as you enter the room, a "Good-morning Honey-bun" (or whatever term of endearment you use). Chances are your little one, or tween one, or teen one has recovered overnight as well. Then, offer up a compliment or the warm fuzzies, even if it feels like you're stretching it.

“You know my favorite way to start the day? Saying I love you.”

“You know what I woke up grateful for? You.”

“You know what makes today already a good one? I get to start it (or start over) with you.”

And then let things move on from there. Because if you just chalk up the newest wave of back talk, obstinance, disrespect, never-ending questions, etc. as another phase that you haven't mastered yet and are wishing was already over, you might miss out on noticing and celebrating some of the milestones your kid is achieving in the midst of the hard stuff.

Those who know me and my family have said my kids are wonderful. And they're right; I know I'm a very lucky mom. They've also congratulated me. - But they aren't perfect kids, nor am I a perfect parent. I absolutely remember those difficult days. I was exhausted - mentally, physically or emotionally. Sometimes all three. I was frustrated, disappointed in my kid or myself as we tangled our way through a sour patch. And, because I wasn't having fun, or maybe felt like I was failing at the most important job out there, I'd wish the day to just hurry up because “Damn it, I need a break!”

Then, "Lord have mercy!" finally, one day I'd realize that I'd figured out this parenthood thing. We had a routine, a schedule, I understood their likes and dislikes. I mastered the art of one-handed diaper changing while feeding the other one a bottle, so that they would both stop crying. I'd smile and tell myself, “Ok, I got this!” Only to realize, literally the next day, my kid was moving on to the next stage of development, also known as a new phase, and I now I have to learn how to keep up. More days would last SO long; I'd make more wishes to get this one over with.

But now, this mom's oldest will be leaving home for college in the fall, and I just finished touring colleges with my daughter who's only one year behind. I find myself seeing a clock hovering over their heads, getting ever bigger, reminding me how little time I have left to scold them for leaving their shoes where I can trip on them, for giving me that attitude, for leaving their crap all over the dining table, so where are we supposed to eat?! And also showing me how little time I have left to walk into their rooms late at night, when they've finally gone to bed to kiss their foreheads like I did when I used to lay them down in their cribs, and think to myself how they really do look like angels when they sleep, and they're all mine. Now I know, just like other mothers warned me, they really do grow up fast. So maybe I shouldn't have wished for time to hurry up because today, I wish I could have more hours in a day.

Reality has set in that all too soon, they won't be coming in the door everyday, taking off their shoes and leaving them in the way. And oh my God, how hard is that going to be?! Of course I will enjoy NOT tripping over their “dammit shoes.” But my smooth sailing through the entryway will remind me that my babies aren't babies, my babies have moved on to the next stage (which means out of our house), and that being a mom of new adults means that this next phase is going to be a long one. I

have to mentally prepare myself because I'm guessing the adjustment will take a while, and the growing pains will be my own.