
***Life with Thnobbits, or How I Got
Baby Pooh on My Shoe***

Christine Louise Hohlbaum



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By Christine Louise Hohlbaum

Dear Reader!

My mama said life is stranger than fiction. She's right. All of the stories you read here are true, without embellishment, exaggerations, or salt added. Okay, perhaps I exercised creative license here or there just to give you the visual. No names have been changed because the innocent-looking aren't as innocent as they seem!

"What's a thnobbit?" you immediately ask. Borrowing from J.R.R. Tolkien's legendary land of the Hobbits, I have developed a world of magic and mystery in my own home. My two children (Sophia, now five and Jackson, now three) are the *thnobbits*--tiny, active, with large feet and smiles to match. The only difference is they aren't imaginary. They are very, very real.

If you like what you read, there's more! Just grab a copy of my world-renowned **Diary of a Mother: Parenting Stories and Other Stuff** (ISBN: 0-595-2804-04) at your local amazon vendor. Or ask your friendly staff member at your local Barnes & Noble. Have them pick up the phone and order a dozen copies for you and your friends!

In the meantime, get a cup of coffee, sit back, and relax with **Life with Thnobbits, Or How I Got Baby Pooh on My Shoe.****

WARMEST BLESSINGS TO YOU,

CHRISTINE LOUISE HOHLBAUM

To subscribe to my popular parenting ezine, *Powerful Families, Powerful Lives*, please visit my Web site at <http://www.diaryofamother.com>

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A Mother's Day Story

The marble stone is Robin's egg blue with a black oval on one side. It is egg-shaped, smooth, and cool to the touch. A dear friend gave it to me one hot June day when I thought I had lost the world. In fact, I was certain my life would never be the same. It turns out I was right.

A month earlier I had suffered a miscarriage. It was Mother's Day 1998 when my first pregnancy ended. As I lay on the emergency room bed at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, MA, my only thought was "I will never be a mother now. God is so cruel." The emergency doctor on call had been a midwife before studying for her medical degree. She assured me my pain, both physical and emotional, would soon subside. I did not believe her. Little did I know how my life would alter once again the following Mother's Day.

My friend placed the stone in my hand and looked me square in the eye. "This stone is a symbol of what is in store for you. Take it. It will give you the strength you need." My heart felt as heavy as stone for I was certain it would never heal. I took the rock and placed it in my pocket.

Two months later I was pregnant again. When the midwife identified my due date, I gave out a cautious laugh. "May 9, 1999? That is Mother's Day." My midwife nodded and assured me the real date of delivery could be two weeks before and beyond the given time. This go around I waited until my fourteenth week to let anyone know our good news. My friend who had given me what I termed the "Robin's egg" gave me a knowing grin when she greeted me. I chose to tell everyone in person at my niece's baptism. My sister agreed it was the right forum for sharing the news.

As May 9th approached, we felt giddy with our impending joy. When the first contractions overcame me during a viewing of "Hunt for Red October" on May 8th, I knew the healing of the last Mother's Day had begun. Ten hours later on May 9th, our little girl, Sophia, took her first breath in this world at Waltham-Deaconess Hospital in Waltham, MA . It was the most empowering experience to watch her emerge from womb to our arms. Mother's Day has a meaning for me now beyond its usual significance.

Two years later we were overjoyed with news that our second child was on the way. My midwifery practice had changed hospitals. We would be delivering our son at Mount Auburn Hospital, the same place where I had lost my first pregnancy. As Jackson was born, a second healing took place. Mount Auburn was now a place of peace and celebration, no longer a place of sadness and loss for us.

Our lives have taken us away from our Somerville home where we resided for six years. Both children were born in Massachusetts. We now live near Munich, Germany. But the memory of becoming a mother is as strong today as the first Mother's Day I celebrated.

My children are lively, curious people with a strong will and the ability to communicate it. On any given day, I wonder if I am cut out to be the mother I so longed to be. When a measure of doubt seeps through my brain, I take out the Robin's egg and place it in my pocket. When my children are shouting for cookies at 8 a.m. or the house is seemingly messy beyond repair, I caress the egg with my hand. It reminds me of my deep desire to do what I do every day. Being a mother is more than labor and delivery. I know that now. My wise friend was right. It does give me the strength I need.

‘Why’ is the Question

A two-year-old isn’t supposed to ask “Why?”. A two-year-old is supposed to have tantrums in public places where there is no way out, look innocent afterwards, and melt your heart the second his flushed face has turned to its normal chubby self. My two-year-old looks innocent enough alright, but his easy going nature has left little room for major kicking in shopping malls and the like. Instead, he asks “Why?” all the time.

By the time kids are three, they are pretty much on their way to asking their parents what this or that means and “Why?” Two-year-olds spend the entire year frustrated that they can’t ask those questions because their level speech development hinders the necessary communication skills to engage in such conversations.

My two-year-old has been telling stories since he was 15 months old. He spins yarns about this neighbor or that one, extricating reams of information from just one gesture or phrase. One day, he saw a farmer cutting wood and made up an entire story about how the wood cutter had hurt his finger. At the drop of a hat, he would retell the story, leaving us laughing and wanting more. The boy is observant, sensitive, and most unusual.

The other day we were looking at a picture book of animals. Squeals of delight escaped his ruby lips as he pointed to this animal or that.

“What is this?” I asked.

“A horse!”

“What is this?”

“A cat!”

I pointed to a giraffe.

“What’s this?”

“A camel!” I referenced the book and found out that camels and giraffes are indeed related, a fact I never knew before.

“What is this?” I pointed to a shark. He didn’t know so I told him. Then I pointed to a guinea pig and asked him what it was. He paused for a moment and furrowed his two-year-old brow. Then he said,

“It’s ...not a shark!” I nodded and agreed with him. Then, for the umpteenth time that day, he asked, “Why?”

I don’t have an answer to that one. Do you?

Mama Mouthpiece

Where is it? I know I left it here somewhere. If I am to reach these children, I need to have it. It was just here... You know what I am talking about. It is long and thin and has a bugle at the end of it. It resembles an Alpine horn. If you don't know what that is, imagine your grandfather's pipe only a lot bigger. It is my Mama mouthpiece, and it is the only thing that gets the point across when my children experience a momentary loss of hearing.

Take the other day. We were walking across the parking lot and my four-year-old daughter bolted to the car on a whim. I had left my mouthpiece at home. Luckily, no one ran her over, but even my shouts of warning fell on deaf ears. Or the time my two-year-old son splashed in the puddle just when I told him not to. It wouldn't have been so bad if he had been wearing his rubber boots, but he was wearing sneakers. After that, he was wearing very wet sneakers and sporting a lovely cold.

Even when I use my mouthpiece, the message that blows through it usually reverberates long enough in my children's minds to have a minimum impact. You can see it in their eyes.

"Mama just said something. I would recognize that voice anywhere." And yet they continue on, doing whatever they are doing despite the repeated warnings blown through the horn.

When my children were very little, their Playskool recorder served its purpose very well. Not only was it a source of entertainment, but it was equally useful as a preliminary Mama mouthpiece when things got a little hectic.

"Get your shoes ooooooon," I would speak in low, slow tones into the recorder's microphone. "Get off your brooooooother," you could hear me saying at any given point in the day. Woefully, the microphone act lost its appeal rather quickly, and I was forced to resort to more drastic measures. That's where the whistle came in.

When I thought of having children, I swore I would never be the whistle-wearing-clipboard-toting-Soccer-Mom-in-a-mini-van type that you see everywhere on school playing fields after hours. It wasn't going to be my fate to stand on the sidelines and blow the whistle at my poor kids as they huffed across the grass, running after a black and white ball.

My children aren't even school age yet, and I have gone from whistle to horn. Perhaps I should go back to wearing the whistle. Give me a second. I need to make a note of it on my clipboard. Oh wait, I left it in the mini van...

Matters of Gravity

Things fall down in my house a lot. I'm not sure why, but I was thinking it might be time to alert NASA. They don't know it yet, but gravity is measured differently within the 110 square meters of living space we have in the house we rent in this Bavarian cow town. I am certain of one thing: there are more things on my floor than anywhere else in the entire Northern Hemisphere.

Playdoh, for instance, is found in inordinate amounts under my kitchen table.

How did it get there?

Gravity.

Juice spills across the lunch table day in and day out.

Why?

Gravity.

My eyelids are dropping.

How come?

Gravity.

I imagine the toys under my living room furniture would not be there if it weren't for the Earth's gravitational pull. If we lived on the moon, the Tinker Toys my son played with last week would still be floating around the atmosphere. The legos he catapults across the room would have landed in Berlin by now. I would be wearing the smile I had at age 19, and my bosom would look as it does when I do a handstand. Lo! But we are not on the moon. We are in a rural town just north of Munich.

Housecleaning on the moon would be easy, I bet. Have crumbs? Toss them up and watch them reach Venus. We'd have permanent helmet head due to the astronaut suits. There would be, however, no need for shampoo, hair brushes or the like.

Recently, my son was jumping on the couch. As is his morning ritual, he was wearing not a stitch of clothing. Suddenly he cried out, "Poop, Mama!" I ran to our not-so-pristine white couch and grabbed him, shouting consoling phrases for him to "hold on!" I even held him upside down, thinking I could defy the despised gravitational pull. He did not make it; neither did my slipper which slid across the wood floor with the product of his concern.

To address such issues, we could purchase a device which simulates lunar gravity, which is roughly $1/6^{\text{th}}$ of the Earth's pull. Can you buy a lunar gravity tent on eBay, I wonder? Gone to the highest bidder with three seconds to spare. That will be \$346.28 please. Payable via PayPal...I'll let you know if it works. If it does, I may not be able to find my computer again. It might be floating to the next galaxy. No more hammering the keys to write inane thoughts. At least then, I can say with full confidence that I'm lost in space.

Surprises

Life is full of lovely little surprises -- some good, some bad. For the most part, I'm caught off guard by all the things that occur in my life.

Take the example of unplanned visitors. Ding, dong – who's at the door? Oh, look! It's an unexpected guest and her three children who've all simultaneously hit that screaming stage in their development. Why, oh why did I not get enough rest last night? Surprise! It's time to deal with the unexpected.

Or how about official papers? Why, for instance, does my passport always expire on a bad hair day? I'm then obliged to have my passport photo taken, thus documenting for ten years the poor behavior of my coif? But, really. Who am I kidding? I have a bad hair day every day, with the exception of my biannual visit to the hair salon. For three hours afterwards, I am led to believe that this time my hair will pay attention and flip just so. Hmph! Not so!

I considered addressing the issue of surprises head on. Why not start a support group, Surprise Avoiders Anonymous? “Hi, my name is Christine, and I am in denial. Surprises just aren't my thing...”

There are many people affected by their dislike for the unknown. Growing up, my friend had eight consecutive surprise birthday parties. After the third one, she started to believe that perhaps surprises weren't such a good thing. How can you act surprised when you knew about the party in advance? Consequently, she learned to despise surprises.

Laying out a careful life plan is essential for a meaningful existence. But, we cannot be prepared for everything. Life's surprises always leave us slightly unsettled, as they do my friend. I recently had an experience, however, which taught me that life can offer us happy surprises, too.

It was a cold, clear winter morning. I had been dreading our morning PTA meeting all week. Dropping off my older child at a friend's house for her first visit there, I wasn't sure how she would react to her new surroundings. Sophia chatted all the while, taking off her coat and feeling quite at home. When my

two-year-old, Jackson, started taking off his coat, her friend's mother, Karin, pleasantly suggested that Jackson stay, too. She had a two-year-old daughter who would love to play with him. Startled by the unexpected invitation, I happily agreed to leave Jackson while I tended to my dreaded appointment.

The sun's brilliance shone in my eyes as I hurried off to my meeting. The meeting itself turned out to be a lot of fun. With only four members in attendance, we got everything done on our agenda in record time and agreed that the meeting had been a success.

Rushing back to my kids, I was concerned that Jackson would refuse to use the potty at the friend's house. Not at all! He surprised me with his willingness to do that, too. Karin invited me to stay for lunch, and we spent another two hours chatting and playing with the kids. The sun warmed our backs, as we shared with each other about our lives. The morning was a success, and I left her house feeling warm and filled.

What surprises lay ahead of us? We cannot predict. But when we receive life's gift, may we be open to receiving it. Life's journey offers many opportunities to seek and uncover the unknown. I may never get used to surprises, but on this trip called life, I must make sure to pack my hair brush.

Cupid's Arrow : Bent, Not Broken

Valentine's Day is a touchy subject with me. It is not that my husband forgets to honor our love on that day. In fact, he is better at remembering Valentine's Day than he is at remembering our anniversary. Perhaps I should consider making our anniversary a National Hallmark holiday with lots of billboards and other advertising to help the poor guy recall the day we became husband and wife. No matter. We have Cupid's celebration for which he can ramp up his adoration for me.

The reason for my apprehension about mid-February's day of romance is quite simple: plants. It was a linguistic misunderstanding, a cross-cultural faux pas that has stuck in my mind for over a decade. You see, my husband is German, and in the beginning of our relationship, my German wasn't that great.

As February 14th neared that first year of our courtship, I suggested to my then boyfriend that Americans celebrate the holiday with flowers. It would be useful if he would remember that. I really thought I had gotten through to him. Without belabouring the point, I would occasionally point out the red hearts and bow and arrow decorations that ornately hung in the shop windows. I would then reiterate my love for flowers and how special a woman feels when she receives them.

Had I been a bit more vigilant in my undertaking, the holiday wouldn't have turned out as it did. The German word *Blumen* means both flowers and plants. As I continually mentioned my interest in *Blumen*, my husband, a biologist by trade, had nodded with great understanding. After many other language barriers had been crossed, it seemed as if I were finally talking his lingo. As Valentine's Day arrived, my excited boyfriend presented me with a spider plant wrapped in light green cellophane. You know which kind of plant I mean: the unkillable kind that has lots of babies, the kind that would even survive while you're away on your six-week African safari.

In that moment, I couldn't help but show my disappointment.

"Flowers! I meant flowers!" I said in English to him in a rather unkind, obnoxious manner. For a moment, it appeared as if he were going to snatch the

plant away from me. I peered down at the lovely wrapping job that he had so painstakingly done and smiled.

"But I suppose plants last longer, huh?" I placed the plant on our sunny windowsill.

I chose to look at our first Valentine's Day this way: he thinks our love will result in an unshakeable marriage with lots of kids. After all, isn't that what a spider plant symbolizes?

We now have two children, and we have been married ten years. While our spider plant did not survive our multiple moves, the lesson that it brought us has remained. Perhaps my husband knew what I meant all along, and he chose a different path for our love, one which lasts for more than just one day in February.

Martian-Speak

Communication between the sexes has been a long-debated issue. How can it be that men and women speak the same tongue without actually speaking the same language? Author John Gray of *Men are From Mars, Women Are From Venus* certainly has a point. We do seem to come from different planets.

To illustrate my point, consider a recent conversation that I had with my husband about dinner meat.

“Did you use all of the meat?” I asked him while I hung the last wash of the day on our drying rack. The kids had been unbearable at bedtime, and my husband’s face still bore the strain of the evening’s events.

“I used one-third of it,” he replied in his scientific way.

“So did you finish up one of the two packages?” I asked. I knew that we had consumed at least two pieces of meat, and I wasn’t sure how many were in each package.

“We ate two pieces,” he said, telling me something I already knew. I became visibly irritated that he hadn’t quite gotten my question.

He could see the annoyance mounting up the back of my neck in shades of red.

“There were six pieces of meat in all,” he remarked.

“So, did we finish up one of the two packages?” I managed to say without throttling him because he was making this so difficult.

“We did not.” He turned back to his newspaper and smiled.

What was that? Here is how the conversation would have gone with a girlfriend.

“Sally, did you use all of the meat?” I imagined myself saying to my friend.

“No, there’s one piece left in the first package,” she would say, sipping her latte and complimenting me on my new haircut.

There you have it. Two sentences versus seven. If men are from Mars, I’m glad that NASA has found water there. They’re going to need it when we women send them back!

Piggy Piggy, Huff and Puff

As I grow older, I have come to believe that the Three Little Pigs were not indeed swine that pranced through the forest avoiding the Big Bad Wolf. They did not play the fiddle, flute, and drum. Peering into the mirror and plucking away at my facial hairs with a pair of tweezers, I am convinced that the Three Little Pigs were actually stay-at-home moms in their mid-thirties.

Let's face it: we all have a little more hair on our chinny-chin-chins these days. We have a bit more padding like the pigs in the fairytale. Our houses look as though a wolf huffed and puffed until he blew our house down. In short, we are the protagonists in the story who learn valuable life lessons with our interactions with the good, the bad, and the ugly.

There is something very fairytale-like about my existence as a stay-at-home mom. Much like the figures in my children's storybooks, I am cast into a world of make-believe every day.

My daughter Sophia likes to pretend that she is Little Red Riding Hood. Never mind that the scarf around her head is not red; she is the little girl in the story who braves the forest on her own and disregards her mother's advice not to tarry. Hmm...that sounds like real life to me.

My two-year-old son recently burned his hand on a hot stove burner. Much like the wolf burning his tushy in the house of bricks, my son yowled and cried and learned a brave lesson: don't touch! He is an optimist, I've noticed. He kept showing us the hand that wasn't adorned with puffy blisters. His fear of all things hot now is not to be overshadowed by his fear of the wolf. For months now, he has reminded me the wolf has to stay outside.

My husband is a bit of a Jolly Green Giant, even though the character belongs on the packages of frozen vegetables in the U.S. and not in any fairytale. My husband is not green, either, unless he's had a recent bout of the stomach bug. There is something comforting about the giant that towers over the green fields in the frozen food section, smiling benevolently at all the grocery shoppers peering into the freezers. My husband has that same smile that says "Come on, trust me. It's not easy being green..."

I suppose there are three kinds of people in the world – those who build their house of sticks, straw, or bricks. I’ve always been a bit of a sticks and brick person. Some days I go all out and take my time to do things right. I get down on my hands and knees and whisk away every speck of dirt that comes my way. Other days I whip a sponge across the table and watch the crumbs fall to the floor with impunity. Who cares? I think. I’ll clean it up later. I’d much rather play the drums with my kids, cuddle under the blanket and chant “Who’s afraid of the Big Bad Wolf – not I!”

Country Countdown

Country living is wholesome. There are lots of farm animals, little traffic, and miles and miles of fields on which the neighborhood dog can do his business without someone stepping in it. The pace is a tick slower, the people chat on the sidewalk, and everyone says hello. They call you by name and often know what you are cooking for dinner. There are no drive by shootings, smog, or ATM hold-ups. Having lived in a Megalopolis for three years with children prior to moving to my Bavarian cow town, I know of which I speak.

Nonetheless, in the winter months, the isolation from people and the bustling energy of the city can be unbearable. Sure, you can drop by a neighbor's house unexpectedly for a cup of coffee and a chat. But after all while, the pining for diversion sets in.

“I want to see something new!” cry my eyeballs as they dance in their sockets and then retreat to the coolness behind their lids. These feelings usually set in when dusk arrives through our windows, and I have run out of ideas to entertain my children until bed time.

Fridays are particularly strenuous days. I can almost observe my energy reserves as they become depleted by lunch time. No sooner have I whisked my four-year-old daughter, Sophia, off to preschool and my son, Jackson, in his bed for naptime, then the two hours of silence race by and I am called back to the mother role with little pep left to make it to 7 p.m.

The other day I made it to 5 p.m. without engaging in mother breathing. Do you know what that is? It is the deep, deep one-two-three-four inhalation that accompanies the attempt to remain calm, very calm, as your two-year-old climbs the back of the couch for the thirty-eighth time in one day. You hang your wash, take a mother breath, and remind your child that ascending the furniture will result, at best, in a time-out with no more video.

You know you have reached that point in your week when you become very, very sad that the TV screen is broadcasting “Tele-Bye-Bye”. For those of you unfamiliar with Teletubbies, they are bright-colored characters with antennae on their heads and TV screens on their tummies. Children love, love, love them! I

pop in a thirty minute Teletubby video and escape to the sanity of my desk. Despite the little papers that threaten to topple onto the keyboard, I feel safe in my cave of creativity. It is when I hear “Tele-Bye-Bye”, when the bright-colored characters have said their peace in thirty minutes that I realize its my turn again to entertain the wee ones. I breathe one-two-three and glance at the clock. The countdown continues. It is 3:28 p.m.

Crumbs on the Table

The phone rang. In a panic, my friend called to tell me her son had just swallowed dish washing liquid and asked if I could pick up her older daughter from gymnastics. After deciphering her frantic words, I agreed and told her not to worry.

She rushed to the doctor with her son. He administered some medicine to eliminate the soap from frothing in his stomach. As gross as it sounds, he was actually fine after the whole thing was over. When my friend came to pick her daughter up later that evening, she suggested that my daughter, Sophia, come over the next day to reciprocate.

The next morning I intended to drop her off and run a few errands with my still ailing son. My friend would have nothing of it. Being the happy-go-lucky Bavarian that she is, she insisted that I stay for a cup of coffee and that I then leave Jackson in her care for the hour that I ran errands. Having been a bit rushed that morning, I agreed. I decided to ignore the household chores that had mounted at home. Even the breakfast crumbs on the table were getting staler and colder by the minute. Friendship, I decided, was more important.

After a brief cup of coffee and some chit chat, I found myself in the parking lot of my favorite cosmetic store. Tooling along the aisles, I realized that this was the first time I had been without children in months. In fact, the last time had been when I went Christmas shopping in Munich. I was in heaven.

Back at my friend's house an hour later, all the children were playing harmoniously. Her husband called to ask her to pick him up for lunch. Though I had an appointment in twenty-five minutes, she begged me to watch the kids while she got her husband at work. She snapped on the TV, and the kids were happy as punch. Meanwhile, as I waved her good-bye, I considered cleaning up the lunch dishes. Searching for her dish washing liquid, it occurred to me that she had none, for obvious reasons. Her trash can overflowed, and the food that had been lobbed on the floor by our feisty bunch could have fed an army of mice. There was no way to clean up the mounting pile of dirty dishes that lay before me. I straightened up as best I could and wished that I could have helped her more.

When she returned from her brief errand, she thanked me for such a restful morning! Her two children happily played with mine, and she was able to relax for the first time in ages. While I felt I should be the one thanking her for my shopping foray alone, we both agreed that the morning had been a success.

When I got home with my son that early afternoon, the breakfast crumbs smiled up at me from their gooey nest on our dining table. They had waited for me, and I knew that I had made the right decision that morning: friendship over crumbs with a pal is better than a clean house all alone.

Streakin'

It took two years, six months and five days. We thought the day would never arrive, but it did. It was the day my children realized they were both here to stay. No, baby brother isn't leaving. No, big sister isn't either. Confronted with this inalterable fact, my children changed their tactic.

Now that this day has arrived, my husband and I are fully unprepared. What do we do? Our children get along famously. In fact, they get along so well that my husband and I feel outnumbered. There are two of them. There are two of us. We still feel in the minority.

A typical morning goes something like this.

The first thing we hear from our crooning son at 5:55 a.m. is "Hot chocolate! Hot chocolate!" His pleading turns to a direct whine which pierces our eardrums to a fully awakened state. We are alert. We are scared. We cannot believe our eyes. It is still dark out, and we are up.

Once our toddler has gotten his calcium intake for the day, we relax some, but the impending excitement leaves us a little unsettled. We know it is only a matter of minutes before our other child will stir. We listen as she pads up the stairs from her basement-level bedroom (yes, we put our kids in the basement, but it's not what you think. There are ground-level windows and lots of light, honest!). She silently eats her honey toast, gathering strength for the oncoming fun she and her brother will have. They live for torturing us before 8 a.m.

It becomes a race. Who can eat the fastest and gain enough momentum first to carry out the plan of wrecking the house within minutes of awakening. This activity is enhanced by the immediate stripping of all clothing. Once the last pair of pajamas hits the floor, the streaking begins.

Two-year-old Jackson typically does a Sumo-wrestler-cum-disco-fever type move to get his nudist juices flowing. He then proceeds to bounce from couch to couch, touching the coffee table lightly as he hurls himself into a pile of pillows on the floor. Four-year-old Sophia joins in the fun, egging him on,

imitating his dance moves, and screaming up the stairs to our bedroom (yes, our bedroom is on the SECOND floor – note there is a floor between us and the children – we planned it that way!). Once there, she and her brother hop on our carefully made bed for a round of “Dumps Dumps”, a game which looks like you’re jumping on a pogo stick, only there’s no pogo stick.

We do have rules in our house. One of them is no streaking when the shades go up. After a few minutes of hopping from bed to the pile of bedcovers (now on the floor), we whip open the shades to blind the kids with sunlight. Thankfully, it is getting lighter in the mornings in Europe now. We haven’t long before we can put an end to their antics altogether.

My son’s latest strategy is to “accidentally” spill something on his clothing. Zip, there go his pants! Flip, there goes the juice-sodden T-shirt. Boing! Off go his tights. He hates them, and it gives him great pleasure to leave them lying with their innards exposed like a snake skin during molting season. It is at these times I am grateful there are only 24 hours in a day. I suppose one morning we will both wake up well before they do. Then we can get our revenge and cry “Coffee! Coffee!” from the top stair.

RubADubDub

Rub-a-Dub-Dub,
I sat on a rug,
Looking my kids in the eye,
They threw their toys
Those girls and boys,
and made me almost cry.

Rub-a-Dub-Dub,
I gave them a tug,
Down to their rooms they went,
They shrieked and bawled,
One and all,
and I went to the Net to vent.

Rub-a-Dub-Dub,
four kids in a tub,
But I actually only have two.
"Just a minute" I yelp,
"Hey, Mama!" they belt.
My gosh, if you only knew!

McMama

There is no doubt about it. I am McMama. It's not that I'm Irish or anything, though legend has it 1/16th of my blood runs green. The title is determined by the wee voices I hear on a daily basis. Not the ones inside my head, but the ones that emerge from the mouths of my sweet angels whose growls and barked orders for various food items give me pause to wonder. Am I really the fast food restaurant they think I am? Do they see the Golden Arches when I draw near? Do they mistake me in my red-rimmed glasses for the head-set wearing twentysomething they see at the drive-thru window? I am not certain.

A typical day at the Hohlbaum residence goes like this. We are dragged from our slumber with the first food order of the day. "High Matz!" sounds the wake-up call. It is my two-year-old son's word for hot chocolate. We lift our tired heads an inch off the pillow to see if his voice was real or imagined. It is just long enough to hear the repeated war cry before something very serious, very ugly is about to happen. We run for cover (or rather, my husband runs to the microwave to heat up the milk in record time). It is 5:03 a.m.

Another order is placed around 6:30 a.m. when Sophia tiptoes up the stairs to our bedroom. We hear her whisper what she imagines to be a dream breakfast: two pieces of toast with Nutella and some apple juice. My head, which feels as if it has barely been placed back down an inch into the cool contours of my pillow, rises once again. An eye opens, then another. She is not a mirage. She is my daughter, and she is hungry.

We manage their first breakfast in relative silence. I usually work for an hour on the computer while my husband struggles to remain awake. By 8 a.m. he leaves the house for work. I try not to call out "Lucky Duck!" as he scampers to the safety of his vehicle. The children and I wave to my husband: both regretfully, and all for different reasons. We get one-half hour into a craft activity, and the hunger alarm rings again. A second glass of juice and a toast are ordered. They appear, as if by magic, with the right jam, spread just so, and a touch of fruit to garnish the plate. Whatever is rejected usually lands on the floor.

By 10 a.m. I am out of ideas to entertain the children. We strive for intellectually stimulating activities until about mid-week. That's when all resistance

evaporates, and I flip on the TV. My husband and I have set a house rule: no TV before 10 a.m. But after that, it's no holds barred.

With deadlines looming and book proposals lurking in the back of my mind, I am as guilty as they come. I arrange playdates when I can, but there are days when the TV is the best babysitter I know. One time a neighbor stopped by twice in one day. Both times the TV was on (and really only for a total of 90 minutes, but she didn't know that!). There I was, standing in my slippers, caught red-handed with my children sitting directly in front of the tube with their mouths open. And you can bet your sweet potato in the span of those one-and-one-half hours that my children ordered the equivalent of a gourmet meal. Too bad my office is on the second floor, and the kitchen is right next to the TV room. I got up each time and fulfilled their wishes. Just call me McMama. And yes, I want fries with that!

OTHER INFORMATION

- For Christine's availability to speak at your organization's event, please contact her at christine@diaryofamother.com. For details, visit her Web site at <http://www.diaryofamother.com>.
- Christine's other writing includes regular parenting columns at <http://www.sanitycentral.com/guest/christine.htm> and <http://www.justformom.com/articles-author-clh.php>
- Are you a writer or book author? Check out my affordable online courses at <http://get-me.to/bookPR> (for book promotion) and <http://tinyurl.com/6og24> (for writing parents).
- Don't forget to subscribe to her weekly parenting ezine, *Powerful Families, Powerful Lives*. <http://www.diaryofamother.com>. It is free and entertaining (just ask my mom)!
- Cut and paste this link to purchase a copy of her book, [Diary of a Mother: Parenting Stories and Other Stuff](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0595280404/diaryofamothe-20). <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0595280404/diaryofamothe-20>

EZINE TESTIMONIALS

"Vivid writing that evokes equally vivid remembered images from when my kid was young..." -- Jen

"Love it!! Great idea." -- Brigitte

"You Rock!" -- Lisanne

"Great newsletter...Boy, can I relate!" - Lisa

"I found myself nodding with that 'been there' mama look at your words :) Too funny--and TIMELY!" – Sarah

"Thanks for your informative newsletter. I look forward to that every week." -- Paula (from VT)

"LOVE IT! LOVE IT! LOVE IT!" -- Tracy Lyn (from Canada)

"Great reading and thought provoking. I enjoyed it immensely." -- Nat

"Thank you Christine for sending your newsletter. I enjoy reading your stories." -- Gloria

"This week's newsletter definitely spoke to me!" -- Malaika (from VA)

"Christine, the ezine is great! The only time I stopped smiling was when you made me think. Congratulations!" -- Larry (from FL)

"I enjoy your column, and I appreciate your sense of humour too." -- Nana (from Ghana)

"I just received my first newsletter, and just had to send you a note. Great job! I look forward to reading more in the near future!" -- Rachel, Publisher of OmaBooks

"Another fantastic job, Christine! I look forward to receiving your newsletter every issue. You always seem to bring a smile to my face. Keep up the good work!" Anita, MommysHelperOnline.com

"I love this piece. I, too can remember my 'pre-mommy' brain...I do enjoy your work." -- Daphne, PhD

"I really got a kick out of your recent Powerful Families e-zine! Great stuff!" -- Bruce

"You are right, even without children, it speaks so much to the issues of families, and the links are fantastic. I so enjoy your writing! Your wit and humor have only grown with time!" -- Sarah (from VA)

"Thanks for your wonderful newsletter." -- Christina (Coach, Intuitive, Healer), PhD

"I've been a subscriber to your newsletter for awhile now, and just wanted to

tell you how much I enjoy it. So many times you've hit the nail on the head for me!" -- Teresa (from WI)

"I love your newsletter and enjoy reading it." -- TinaFay (from LA)