

How Do We Clean?

By Sheila Johnson

Some of my most precious memories were formed when I brought my three babies into this world. Nothing was or has been any better. I cherished cleaning those chubby faces when they were smeared with milk, food, or dirt. I even found joy in changing their dirty diapers, knowing they would soon return to dry, soft, comfort. Those were simple and pure messes that only a mother could appreciate.

As the years grew them up, their worlds became more complicated as did mine. The messes took on different characteristics that were not so simple. The messes became somewhat skewed, somewhat confused, somewhat unknowing. Mother Nature took over and presented them with pimples, bones growing faster than muscles, allergies, first loves, broken hearts, and disappointments from a changing world. As they entered adulthood, we survived the cruelties of the world together. We grew closer and formed a bond like no other. And now we are able to overcome whatever comes our way. And yes, there were more messes to clean up, but the life we have had together as a family, I know to be simple compared to the world beyond our close-knit family.

I couldn't clean the chubby cheeks of the babies who survived Hurricane Katrina, because no matter how hard I wiped, the strokes didn't come from mothers who they would never see again. I tried to understand the confused and angry minds of teenagers who live outside of the bars where both parents live within. Is Mother Nature partnering with Global Warming to punish a people who are not honoring their God? I fight hard every day to process the rising up of racism, misogyny, and the many forms of evil ever-present. It seems that the IT gods have created a mess that no man or woman can cleanse: keystrokes speak for us, and emojis feel for us. Videos take away the sting of death, and create life that can only exist on plastic screens. We find ourselves living inside of a swelling mess, and the eye of the storm is just beginning to form.

Yet in the midst of the messes created by natural disasters, by human error, and by wars and rumors of wars we can clean up the messes in our own minds with clear thinking, determined action, focused living, and active loving.

Cleaning up messes can be as simple as cleaning a baby's behind, or as impossible as eradicating evil. We all have choices: when and how will we clean up the messes.