

personality



Where did you come from?

Words by Alana Kirk-Gillham

Not many of us feel we are in control when we become parents. But after the initial weeks of hellish helplessness, you start to get the knack and in no time can carry on with life, wooden spoon in one hand, phone in the other, baby hanging off our hip as we sing *Wheels on the Bus*, cook dinner and manage our life at the same time. You are Director of Operations. Certainly, there are times in that first couple of years when you feel the tiny nappy-wearer actually wears the trousers, but on the whole you manage the team and coach the crew with a moderate modicum of success. You are in charge (the odd screaming fit notwithstanding, where we revert to Prime Pleaser just to shut them up).

But a strange thing happens at two and a half. Those little quirks of character that were so adorable only days before, the little traits of trouble that temporarily taunted you but made you smile, the little expressions of independence that engaged you are now turning into a full-

blown personality. It takes a while to sink in, but the slow realisation that this is a real person with real wants and real ideas dawns like a rain cloud slowly drifting across a sunny sky. They've suddenly got teeth – and not just the milk kind.

And although the sunny skies of this wonderful world your child is bringing you are filled with joy and fun and rainbows, they are also interspersed with unpredictable storm clouds that can dampen the spirit.

The first words that did it for me were 'I do it!' To get full effect, these words have to be shouted, with a firm stamp of the foot. And no-one can quite yell 'NO!' like

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an indignant toddler. These were quickly followed by 'not yet!' which became the stock response to my every request. As I instituted manners this became 'not yet, PLEASE!', but still. Assertion was asserting itself ... and I wasn't sure I was going to like it. There was a cute coup on the horizon and my dictatorship was in the last throes of power. I realised that in order to avoid a complete rebellion I had to concede some areas of control. And so the pink revolution was born. One day, my tomboy woke up and announced she would only wear pink. And not just pink. Just pink dresses and skirts. No more trousers, no more blue. The pink gene had emerged and it was vibrant. But where did it come from? Certainly not from me. Over the last six months she has begun to take greater responsibility for her life – she can make a mean peanut butter sandwich; she can dress herself (I've had to stop apologising for her eclectic attire at playschool). She helps me make lunch, and sets the table. She talks and talks and talks. She is becoming her own person and she takes my breath away.

Who is this child who can give me a look to stop traffic? Who is this child who can run into my arms and hug me like chicken soup for the soul? Who is this child who can make me laugh out loud, and make my heart melt? It can be great and it can be gruesome. My friend's beautifully funny three-year-old was asked to calm down on a busy shopping street. The little will-power wielding wobbler announced – with perfect diction, 'I'm not even going to THINK about calming down. Actually.' A dumbstruck mum could only laugh.

But luckily – just like an Irish summer, the sunny skies and rain clouds intermingle and bring a kaleidoscope of colour to your days. With personality comes power of course, but also humour, love, wonder, questions and imagination. This little person that has entered your world will always remain a mystery – I look at my two and am astounded they are mine. Our job is not to crack the mystery, but to stand in awe of it, keep it in check, and sit back and watch the show. And when the sun shines, it beams. Last week we were having lunch and my daughter put down her fork and said 'Mummy?' I looked at her, and she smiled, 'I love you.' Bring it on, I say.... *