

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!

LIKE MOST PEOPLE, I COULD SEE FROM BIRTH, BUT SOMEHOW BETWEEN LIFE AND LIVING I LOST THE MAGIC OF SIGHT.
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I learned to see again at 37, and it was not glasses or laser surgery that renewed my vision, but the eyes of my 17-month-old daughter. Now I look at the world through fresh, bright eyes, I absorb the beauty of everyday things, and I have learned all over again to appreciate what a wonderful world it is.

Anyone who has ever watched and loved the Dead Poet's Society understands the principle of standing on a table, or on top of a hill, to gain a different perspective on the world. I now realise there's an even better view – and it's about a foot high. One day, following the advice of one of my many baby / toddler tomes, I got down on my hands and knees to crawl around the living room at Daisy's height to assess the potential dangers that lay in reach of those curious fingers and eager mouth. It absolutely amazed me: so much furniture to climb, so many corners to investigate, so many cables, hinges, nooks and crannies. So much dust! It also felt quite daunting: tall towering plants, giant mountainous furniture, so many tempting objects frustratingly out of reach – or worse, a perilous climb away. I also realised how much my little daughter had to look up all the time, and so I decided to make

a concerted effort to get down on the floor to her level as much as possible. Now I regularly become a hobbit for the afternoon, and the little people have a great time! Although it can be daunting, it is also so very exciting. Flowers in the garden tickle your face, cuddly cats stride past as big as elephants allowing you to hug them with your whole body, low, wide window ledges beg to be climbed onto to watch the world go by, a jungle of shoes in the bottom of

the wardrobe cry out to be waded through.

Watching my child discover all her 'firsts' has been a journey of discovery for us both. The first time she experienced wind on her face and tried to sweep it away with her hand, I felt just how gentle a whisper of breeze can feel. It is something we adults take for granted, yet it makes a child giggle with glee. The first time she saw snow, her face wide in amazement and confusion, I took fresh delight in tracing my





hands through it and tasting its icy goodness on my tongue. We took time out from the bustle and rush of going somewhere and stood in the garden eating snow and it made our day. The first time she saw the ducks in the park, wide-eyed and excited, I quacked till I was hoarse and we laughed at their sheer silliness. I'm 37 and now I quack at least once a week – it's so good for the soul! The first time she stepped in a puddle, confused by the moving ground,

she looked at me for reassurance. For 25 years I had avoided puddles, too grown up to get my feet wet. But that day I stamped in a long lost memory and relished its delight all over again. We splished and splashed all the way to the shops and it just didn't matter that our feet got wet. And it wasn't just with my eyes I found new adventure. Giving Daisy her first strawberry to eat, I could almost taste the luscious sweet red berry anew. Those first delicious drops of

ice-cream – how heavenly for us both! Eating wibbly wobbly jelly with our hands – can there be more fun? (The downside, of course, is that I had to eat broccoli for the first time in twenty years and still think I deserve an Oscar for my performance of enjoyment!)

But as with all new discoveries, lessons have to be learnt. Those bright blue, beautiful eyes are so innocent and naive and, although I wish she could hold on to that wonderful world forever, I know I have to show her that it may not always be so. At the moment, every dog she sees is a big cuddly pal like Harry next door, who wants to lick her upturned face and let her pull his tail. I somehow have to teach her to be cautious without dissipating her delight in animals, because I know not every dog will be as patient as Harry. In every new person that says hello or comes to the door, she sees another friend to give and get hugs from, whose hand she will happily take to play in her wonderful world. At some point though, I will have to teach her to distinguish between friends and unfamiliar people, because I know not all strangers are friends. I need to teach her that sometimes the world isn't so wonderful – there are wasps, nettles, deep water, cars, strangers, and I dread seeing the bright light in her eyes diminish just a fraction. I will have to teach my fearless enthusiast caution and calm and it breaks my heart. It is just so hard. How can I pull her away from the toilet telling her it's 'dirty' when she takes such squealing pleasure from the rush of flushing water? Yet, I must. How can I tell her not to put the daffodil head in her mouth and eat it when they must look so enticing? Yet, I must. How can I be stern and cross and tell her not to pull the cat's tail when he rolls in front of her flicking it tantalisingly in her face? Yet, I must. Not all toilets are as clean as ours. Not all plants are safe to eat. One day the cat just might fight back.

With every new adventure, together we must both learn the delights and dangers. So I guess, as with everything in parenthood, it's all about balance. I want her to keep teaching me how wonderful the world is as we explore its array of miracles and beauty every day, and I need her to learn from me how to be safe and kind and respectful.

And I suppose that is how it should be – we will teach each other, my child and I, and between us we'll make our world a better place.