

THIS IS WHY WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS

Clint Edwards

I Blamed My Wife For Our Messy House, I Was Wrong For Many

Reasons

I was building shelves in my garage when a neighbor girl, one of my 4-year-old daughter's friends, Helen, approached me and said, "I just saw in your house. It's pretty dirty. Norah's mommy needs to clean more."

"Some people find comments like that rude," I said.

Helen looked at me with a snarky smile and said, "yup!"

What really sucks about what 5-year-olds say is that they are 100 percent honest. And indeed, our house was a mess. At the time, I could probably have listed a million reasons to explain our clutter piles, random installments of underwear, laundry baskets full of clean laundry sitting precariously in the middle of the living room, and so on. There always seems to be a bracelet loom, a couple dolls, a play dough kit, and a few dirty dishes on the table.

We always have random kids hanging out in our living room, or on the porch, eating our food, and making messes by getting out our toys and not putting them back. We also just had a new baby, probably the biggest (and best) reason for our messy house.

But none of those excuses really matter, because there seems to be no justifiable excuse for having a messy house.

There are people with messier houses. I've seen them. And when I was young, I'd go to these houses, and say rotten things like, "I just saw in your house. It's pretty dirty."

THIS IS WHY WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS

Clint Edwards

Then I'd run home, and tell my mother about it, and we'd laugh and judge these messy house people. My mother would say things like, "Doesn't she care about her kids? Or her home?"

It always came down to blaming the mother.

Although we live in an age of partnership and equality, where a stay-at-home dad is not that unusual (in fact, I was one for a short time), no matter what the dynamics of the family, people still blame my wife for our messy home.

I suppose I know this because I, too, used to blame my wife for our messy house.

Shortly after she became a stay-at-home mom, I started getting really judgmental. I started looking at the state of the house and thinking, "You have one job! One job! To take care of the home."

I never considered the fact that kids just don't care if you dust. They'll drop Cheerios anyway. When I was a stay-at-home dad, I'd sweep beneath the table, and 10 minutes later, it was dirty again. I'd have the kids put their toys away before bed, and by morning, before I even got up, they were back out.

I don't want to speak for your kids, but my kids are remarkable mess makers.

What I discovered was that taking care of the home is actually a collection of many full-time jobs. My wife is a housekeeper, disciplinarian, teacher, nurse, chauffeur, comforter, cook, part-time student, school volunteer, neighborhood caregiver, and more.

A few years ago, Mel and I got into an argument about the house. I told her it was embarrassing. I asked her what she did all day. "It really can't be that hard to keep the house clean," I said.

THIS IS WHY WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS

Clint Edwards

We got into a huge fight. Mel told me that I needed to realize what she was up against. And then she told me something that really hit home. She said,

“Sometimes it comes down between cleaning the house and taking Tristan and Norah to the park—or spending time having fun with them or teaching them to read or write. Sometimes I can either do the dishes, or teach our son how to ride a bike, or our daughter how to walk. I’d rather do those things, frankly. I’d rather not be that mom who ignores our kids, and myself, because I’m so busy worrying about what the neighbors might think of our messy house.”

I stopped looking at the dirty dishes, assuming that they were evidence of Mel sitting around all day. Instead, I got up myself and started washing the dishes. I realized that this was not her mess, but our mess, and I started pitching in more.

I stopped worrying about the house, and started paying attention to the development of our children. I started to pay attention to how happy they were, and the kind of relationship they shared with their mother, and I noticed that we have a messy house, and really happy, bright kids.

I’m not saying that if you have a clean house, you are doing something wrong. But what I am saying is that I don’t judge my wife for teaching my son how to swim, rather than vacuuming the living room. I don’t judge her for potty training my daughter rather than clearing the table. And I don’t think you should look down on stay-at-home moms with a messy house, because chances are, they are using that time wisely.