

Fiction, 2180 words

Ezra's Playgroup

Dear Ashley,

I hope you and Rob and Hannah are doing well. I'm sure you can guess why I'm writing. I decided to write you a good, old-fashioned letter because I think it shows my seriousness, with a nice personal touch like the friend connection of playgroup moms. Also, not that you would ever forward personal emails around, but you never know where words can go when you put them online, right?

I need to tell you the real story behind what happened the other day that resulted in your email asking me and my son to leave playgroup. (I know the other mothers were part of that decision too, so I'm not trying to blame this all on you.)

Ashley, I know you can imagine how not being in the playgroup is terrible for Ezra. And I think we should always do what's best for the children, like we said when we had our Moms Brunch last year to first plan our playgroup. It's been almost a year of playgroup, can you believe it??

I truly believe that the mom-bonds we made in the perinatal health group and then in our "fabulous escapes" at Salon Du Chat, and in our mom fitness at Zumba and Pilates, that these bonds are strong enough to get us through this misunderstanding. Moms can work it out, right? (Ian is very concerned and was going to call Rob, but I told him to let the moms handle this!)

So, onto what happened Wednesday morning. Stacey came to pick up Lucy early. I'm sure she knocked and rang the bell like usual (She always does both! Have you noticed?) but I didn't hear her. I know this made her nervous wondering where I was, but everything was fine.

The kids were in the playroom downstairs and I was upstairs for just a moment on the computer. As I know she told you, she walked into the house, which was totally fine of course, I would have done the same thing. And after she found the kids playing, all 6 of them totally happy and fine, then she came upstairs, and found me in the home office. And that was when she screamed and I screamed and the kids downstairs started running upstairs, or crying. Your darling Hannah was crying, I think because of all the noise, but everyone was fine and little mister Skye Johansen just kept right on playing, he realized there was nothing wrong or scary going on. So the kids were safe and happy downstairs while I was upstairs, but some of them got a little confused and scared, and some of them not at all, when Stacey started screaming and then yelling at me.

What Stacey saw was not what I should have been doing. I know that. But what I was doing was perfectly normal and natural, and I was by myself until she barged in. I know I should not have done that while I was the mom in charge of playgroup, but I was a little out of it that day. Not in a way that affected my supervision of Hannah, Lucy, Skye, Jonas, Lucas, and Ezra, but still I was not using my best judgment. And the other thing that Stacey saw, the stuff that was sitting beside me on the CD case when Stacey came in, was not what I was doing up there. That was left over from the night before, a different day altogether. I was totally fine when playgroup started.

After Stacey surprised me upstairs, she kept screaming and yelled that I was “unfit to do playgroup” and ran downstairs and out the front door dragging poor Lucy behind her before I could say a word. I ran to the front window and opened it to apologize but she was slamming car doors open and shut and loading Lucy and her bag in and she was already on the phone saying “I told you not to ask her” and then I swear she said “she’s not like us.” And right then, whatever

she was saying on the phone (was she talking to you?) she looked up and saw me in the window and gave me a really nasty look and slammed the car door. That last comment and that crazy look hurt the most out of all this.

And then all the rest of you came right over as soon as you could ... even though playgroup was over at noon anyway, but none of you let me explain while you were taking your kids away so fast, like my home was dangerous, like it was made out of bisphenol-a or something. This was all very shocking and hurtful. And the kids were looking forward to the kale and almond butter clusters I made them. The kids seemed pretty shook up, actually, to have to leave like that.

I understand what Stacey was feeling and what she told you all that made you so mad. But it's not true that I'm not fit to do playgroup. And I certainly hope you don't agree that I'm some other sort of person from you guys. We are neighbors, this is the neighborhood play group. We live less than a mile away and our kids go to the same school and we eat and shop at the same places. We are a fun group of good moms! Friends!

So, what Stacey saw, was I was just taking a break to satisfy my curiosity about a movie. One of those "Google moments" like Ian says, it just struck me when I was leading the kids in an activity they love called "playgroup dance party." Has Hannah told you about it? She loves our dance parties! (We should really get together, all the moms, and share ideas for what the kids like to do in playgroup, that would be fun for us and good for the kids, don't you think? Over a glass of Tempranillo? Or your latest favorite?)

At Playgroup Dance Party, the kids were having a great time and I played the old Whitney Houston song "My Love is Your Love." Hey, the fun for the mom doing playgroup is you play whatever songs you want and the kids will dance to it. Since Whitney died, I have been

listening to her music a lot. Poor woman, did you see all the Facebook tributes? I brought the tribute to playgroup!

So the kids are dancing around and there is that line about “the chains of Amistad.” And I got to thinking about that movie “Amistad,” about slavery, with Anthony Hopkins and that really handsome black guy with the shaved head whose name I won’t even try to spell. I got so curious about the year that movie came out and who the other actors were in the movie, because I played that Whitney Houston song. And the kids were dancing like crazy and I made a little playlist to keep them having fun and safe and ran upstairs because I was dying to know about the movie and that man’s name. And, to be totally honest, what other movies he has been in because he’s so handsome and sexy. (Well, he is, you have got to agree, girl, right?) The thing I was doing on the computer when Stacey caught me was answering my movie trivia question.

Wow, I can’t believe this has turned into such a long letter. My hand is getting tired, but I am enjoying doing all this writing! I hope my handwriting isn’t hard to read. Sometimes I think so and sometimes I wonder. I got this paper as a wedding present, and have barely used it in the 6 years since. Do you write letters? I recommend it!

So when Stacey found me, yes, I was doing what she thought I was doing. My hands were not on the keyboard, put it that way. But it was just for a minute because I was so distracted by a photo that came up of that actor in “Amistad”. I didn’t know that there were actual pics of him totally naked from the movie. I thought you couldn’t see him totally naked, but there he was. In all his glory (my mother used to say that) and so handsome, and that’s the exact one moment that Stacey walked in. But I didn’t leave the kids to go look at porno on the computer, not at all. That would be totally creepy, right?

So that was what Stacey saw. And she saw the other thing, too, the “party powder” on the CD case with the little “Cars 2” straw. She laughed when she saw the straw. I guess it was pretty funny, the little red straw for kids, with the little Lightning McQueen smiling car handle on it, but that was worse than what I was really doing. I want you to know I would of course never use drugs while watching your Hannah or Stacey’s Lucy or any of the boys. That was left from the night before with some friends we don’t see much anymore. They are from a life left behind when we moved into Bay Forest.

Except for keeping them as friends until now (not anymore! Bringing that into my house? On a Tuesday night??), I have settled in nicely to this better place and better life. Remember how I was then? A hardworking new mom with my own sense of small-town style, but not the foodie or fashion-aware woman Bay Forest has let me become. There was no Whole Foods in Taylorsville!

I know some people used to say I had a problem with what Stacey saw on the desk, but I don’t anymore and I want you to know that for sure. I really did put it aside after Stacey’s pool party two years ago, her last one. I didn’t mean for things to get out of hand that time, I was not trying to seduce anyone or anything, but still I apologize again for that now, like I did then. I know that in our neighborhood, bra and panties are not acceptable to wear into the pool, even if they aren’t white and see-through. And just one other thing about that time at the pool party. I didn’t mean for Ricky to come into Stacey’s yard, he was just coming over to meet me at the fence. I told Stacey that but I don’t know if she told you. I did not mean to bring a wild card like Ricky into the pool party, particularly while the kids were still up. He promised me when I called him to make a delivery that he was not “getting high on his own supply”. I don’t know if you ever heard that full story from Stacey, but that’s really the way it happened.

Hey, nobody's perfect, right? You had to end your wine club subscription, and I always felt so supportive of you during that period. Stacey and her Ambien, we are all human. I thought we had each other's backs here in playgroup. Pump and dump can only get you so far, is what we used to say at the salon retreats and Mom Brunch, right? Hey, my hair is due for a cut, I'm thinking about bangs again. I know, such a commitment. Want to go with me? I think bangs and a pencil skirt could be a new look for me. It looks great on our babysitter Megan. Sound cute?

Whew! Now my hand is really tired. I haven't written a letter that goes on for 10 pages since summer camp when I was thirteen! It feels good to clear the air, though. Please let me know what you think about when I can bring Ezra to playgroup again. When Wednesday morning comes around, he will miss his little buddies and it breaks my heart to think of him not being in playgroup with Lucas and Skye particularly. Boys need to be with other boys, I think you were the first person to say that to me.

Please pass my apologies on to the rest of the mom crew, it's such a great group of girls. If you don't want to do a hairdo date, call me or email or Facebook me to set a date after Pilates or yoga some day this week. My tree pose is getting good, almost as good as yours now!

Or I would love to treat you to a special Moms Lunch of lobster mac and cheese at the Yacht Club, like old times. Remember how we laughed so hard when I finally realized that the Yacht Club Restaurant had no boats anywhere around it? That was a fun day.

Again, my deepest apologies for the embarrassing situation that led to this letter, to you and Stacey in particular. I am looking forward to your reply, for the sake of Ezra and all the children.

Your friend and neighbor,

Tara