

Seeing Double

Sometimes moments hit me. I open my eyes, look around and realize how lucky I am to have the people with me who are with me.

Like yesterday, when I took my teenage son and daughter to the park. I know it's a normal thing, but when I looked up from my book and saw them casually passing a baseball back and forth, I was hit with a wave of gratitude. Gratitude for Emma's smile. Gratitude for the two of them together. Gratitude that they are enjoying something so simple.

When Jason was ten and Emma eleven, they came up with a musical skit to perform for my husband and me. It was long and boring, and they laughed almost constantly through the whole thing, but I didn't even mind, because the sight of the two of them leaning on each other as they went weak with peals of laughter brought me such joy. The songs they sang with their deplorable harmonies were the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard, because what I heard were the voices of the two of them together.

Last week, at the grocery store, they were so bored that Jason started interviewing Emma about the pieces of produce. She slipped right into the role, first playing a southern potato farmer, then an Indian merchant trying to sell her spices, and finally a posh, English gentleman telling the 'reporter' why he loved fresh produce.

They are so silly when they're together.

I am so grateful that they get to be together.

Even the times when Emma complains to me that Jason hid her schoolbook, or Jason comes whining because Emma is taking an hour in the bathroom again, I can't help but be grateful. Just the fact that there are two of them to complain about each other.

The fact that Emma is here to interact with Jason is so special to me.

She almost wasn't.

Someone ran a red light and our car was t-boned. He hit us on the side Emma was on. They took her straight to the hospital. They thought she wouldn't make it.

That was four days before her sixth birthday.

I already had her present, a plastic horse as big as she was with a tail and mane for grooming. She was so excited when she opened it, and I was so grateful.

She was so pretty when she blew out her six candles, so genuine when she thanked us, and so sweet when she hugged her father and me. And when she and Jason threw their cake at each other, I didn't even reprimand them; I was just so grateful that they were both there to throw cake at each other.

Just a few days earlier, I had been sitting by her hospital bed, so scared I would have to return that horse.

I didn't return the horse.

I couldn't bring myself to take it back.

No...Jason didn't throw cake at Emma. We never cut the cake. None of us wanted to eat it.

No...Jason was on his phone during the entire shopping trip.

No...They never performed skits together. Jason decided not to do the acting class because there was no one to do it with him.

No...Jason was in a batting cage. Two brothers we didn't know were throwing the ball back and forth, and I wasn't filled with gratitude. I just cried. I cried, and I imagined what it could have been like.

Because when they thought she wouldn't make it, they were right.

She didn't blow out her candles; we just burned them in her honor.

She didn't open the horse; it's still sitting in its wrapping paper.

She didn't give me that thank you hug.

But I wish she did; I spend so much time wishing she did, picturing her face, imagining the grip of her little arms, envisioning a different life with a brother and a sister growing up together.

But every time I open my eyes to the real world, I am blinded by the tears, because Jason is by himself, and Emma is nowhere to be seen.