

Arrested Development

By Tara Spinelli for Jersey Moms Blog

Between bites of Boursin on a Town House at a recent holiday gathering, I suddenly lost my appetite, and the retro cheese platter wasn't to blame. It was a chilling tale of arrested development that stopped my crunching cold.

A friend recounted a visit from her boyfriend's grown children during which the 29-year-old son left his dirty underwear in the middle of the living room floor because "there was no hamper in the bedroom" and he "didn't know where else to put it."

I already know my 9-year-old son resembles a 29-year-old man in several ways, including his aptitude for negotiation when it comes to getting what he wants and his sarcasm when he doesn't.

What pulled me up short was how much a 29-year-old man could resemble a 9-year-old boy. Underwear on the floor. A confused expression when asked why. Lame excuses. Sure, some teenage boys I know share obvious similarities with my son, such as blowing their noses in the hand towels, leaving a trail of crumbs and food wrappers, throwing clean clothes in with dirty (and dirty with clean), letting their toenails grow into talons. But a grown man? An adult by all other accounts?

One summer, especially tired of finding wet swim trunks on my wood floors wherever the hapless wearers decided to drop trow, I attempted to institute the Boys to Men program. This was a special disinterest group of Camp Benign Neglect, where all campers are welcome provided their parents agree to our terms of service (which doubles as our motto): "If it ain't bleeding, don't fix it."

In a rare bout of interaction with the campers, I reviewed the rules, I demonstrated proper technique, I threatened to call parents of repeat offenders, I talked glowingly about the pride of taking care of your things and always knowing where to find them. Then, just hours after my special session with the boys, negotiating a freshly planted minefield of twisted trunks, the heat rising under my collar... I bent over and picked them up myself.

And that's exactly the problem. Fast-forward to a 29-year-old man's dirty underwear in his dad's living room. Is this grim glimpse of the future inevitable? Is it what I want for my son, not to mention myself?

Like Scrooge after his visit from the Ghost of Christmas Future, maybe I can learn from past mistakes. Instead of letting my son's selective and deliberate ignorance go unchecked, I can require accountability before it permanently interferes with my enjoyment of Boursin.

Parents of boys, make the world a better place. Stand with me against arrested development and make them do it themselves. (Just give me a minute to freshen up the hand towels.)