

LAUNDRY ROOM MYSTIC

Stephanie Roth Pairitz

When the kids requested we celebrate religious holidays in the laundry room, insisting it was where they felt closest to a higher power, I knew it was time to seek outside help.

The therapist was quick to assure me I had no one to blame but myself.

From the time the children were young and limping around in grossly mismatched socks, I followed Erma Bombeck's lead and told them the laundry room was a special place where socks left this world to go live with Jesus. How was I supposed to know they could be traumatized by stories of "Laundry-Room Land," where daddy's wardrobe was transfigured into sportswear for gerbils? I never realized there were critical development periods during which children should not be exposed to overfed washers that break free from walls, ker-thunk across basement floors, and vomit all over playrooms.

I suppose, at some point, I could have been honest and explained that mommy simply lacked the mental capacity to "do laundry." Who knows if it is better for a youngster to believe her mother is a buffoon, or that the laundry chute is a "Magic Time Machine" in which clothes age instantaneously?

Luckily, kids are resilient. Our children have developed unique coping mechanisms to deal with our basement's paranormal activities. Grunge-Child has elected not to have her clothes washed at all, choosing instead to stuff all worn clothing back into her drawers. She has consequently developed a look all her own, standing out from the

Downy-smelling masses of her peers. Shopper-Girl sensed opportunity. She calculated that by shoving ALL her clothes in the hamper every day, she could greatly reduce her bedroom clean-up time, while exponentially increasing the odds of her laundry being ruined. Thus, assuring her of a valid excuse to buy new clothes. The baby determined that by rubbing spaghetti into his clothing... well I haven't figured out exactly what his angle is yet. The point is they're fine.

It's not as if I have not tried to do better. I watch commercials. I buy the detergent that promises to be gentle on my baby's skin, while making me look ten pounds lighter with a brighter smile. I even asked a well-laundered neighbor if I could watch her wash her family's clothes, to pick up a few hints. I was a little put off when she failed to pre-sort her laundry into piles of darks, lights, expendable, and non-expendable clothing. I tried to remind myself that it takes all kinds, when she professed she almost never used the dryer's "Industrial Shivel" setting. But when she tried to tell me the term "Hang Dry" was **not** a Midwestern version of the California "Hang Ten," but an actual suggestion for drying delicate clothes, we had to part ways. There's a limit to what this mother is willing to do, even for her family.

So we celebrate Christmas in the laundry room this year. If that's what it takes to sustain my children's illusions of maternal aptitude, it's a price I'm willing to pay.