NORTH SHORE MOM

In life, perfect isn't always possible

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When I was pregnant with my first child, Emma, I would envision what my experiences would be like as a parent. I had images of tea parties, playing dress-up and having these amazing picture-perfect moments.

Well, after having two kids, I soon realized I was an idiot back then. I am not sure what was more stupid of me to believe:

1) That my life with my children would be about endless joy and perfect days and nights.

2) That, while in college, eating plain white rice with my best friend was healthy because it was "fat free."

Both are pretty naive. But based on my experiences — and the fact that I now understand what a nutrient-dense meal is — I know I have come a long way, baby.

These days, perfect, sweet flashes of brilliance are very rare. In fact, I am often asking myself, "Where are the precious moments?" They are so rare that they have become split seconds of happiness that move so fast anyone can miss them. And in between the best moments and the impossible ones is life, and navigating between it all is the hardest part.

Two weeks ago, my daughter started kindergarten. We have been talking about this moment for months. We read countless books about kindergarten. We have talked to Emma about how amazing her school is and why this is such a special time in her life. I believed she was ready — and I was, too. I was, in my head, setting the scene for one of those "first day of school" priceless moments.

It would be pure joy and happiness for both of us — the first-ever walk to Greenbriar School; the looks of wonderment on Emma's face as she entered the building; and those brown eyes lighting up just like the flash on my camera.

Well, guess what? It didn't turn out that way. And as much as I hyped up that special moment in my head, it all came crashing down.

The irony is that Emma wasn't at fault for crushing my vision — it was her brother, Eli. I never thought that Eli (my sweet boy!) would be the one to be responsible for making the good moment go bad. But, oh, he did.

Eli was the one that had more separation issues than Emma. They are 2 1/2 years apart and very close to each other. He follows her like a puppy dog. In fact, they do play "puppy." (Emma is the owner and Eli the dog. He pants with his tongue out and follows any of her commands.) Clearly, he would do anything for her.

As we entered the Greenbriar classroom and began meeting Emma's teachers as well as some of her classmates, Eli started realizing he wasn't able to participate. As soon as Emma was called over to the rug for her first "story time," Eli had a complete meltdown. He threw his body on the floor and was kicking and screaming. He was crying so hard he could hardly breathe. He was creating such a scene, and he was ruining this amazing moment for Emma.

I could not imagine her embarrassment, but she was handling it with such grace. I, on the other hand, was having a nervous breakdown.

I was holding Eli through the tantrum, but I could not listen. I couldn't even concentrate, and everyone was staring at me. I mean, of course, when there is a train wreck happening, you stare, right? I was then reminded — again — that any semblance of having this gorgeous kindergarten moment was lost forever.

As soon as Emma came back to us, Eli calmed down. He threw that tantrum with such perfect timing, and in a flash, it was all over.

I walked home with Emma and apologized for Eli's behavior and tried to have a teachable moment. Or maybe it was a teaching moment for me because Emma really wasn't fazed by it. She knew it was wrong of him to act like that, but she still loved her time and was excited for school. I was the one that was upset that he stole that moment from her — but she seemingly recovered.

Watching her walk home with such confidence, she ended up teaching me something — and that was the treasured moment I waited for. It wasn't what I expected, but I'll take it.

Karen Firsel is a former television producer who has worked for Inside Edition, MSNBC, CNN and "Oprah." The mother of two children, Karen now lives in Northbrook with her husband, Adam, and does on-camera lifestyle reporting for various Chicago stations. Reach her at NorthShoreMomKaren@gmail.com.

Gloria Dei invites community to volunteer

STAFF REPORT

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 1133 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, is joining with thousands and homeless in our community and around the world.

The fourth-grade "Solid Rock" Youth Group will kick-off the weekend on the evening for Bread for the World, which advocates for an end to hunger at home and abroad.

And then, on Sunday morning, Sept. 8, kids and adults in worship at 8:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m., and to enjoy refreshments and fellowship all morning long.

Details are available from