

FINALISTS



Twisting Ruby's Hair

by Rebecca Boggs; Greenbelt, MD

THAT TIME I won parenting was when my daughter Ruby, then age 4, stood smiling up at me in our church entryway, her shiny hair in twists like black licorice.

"Your hair looks so pretty," our elderly African-American church friend said. My daughter grinned.

"Did you do her hair? It's beautiful," our friend continued.

"Yes, I did, thank you," I beamed.

"I'd like it if you could do mine," she said.

I felt I had received the ultimate compliment. Since I am Caucasian and have straight hair, it took me a long time to learn how to do my African-American daughter's

superthick, curly hair. When we adopted her, I had no idea what a challenge her hair would be. I didn't realize just washing and combing her hair would take 45 minutes.

I didn't know that many African Americans spend anywhere from an hour to an entire afternoon having their hair styled. Occasionally, I took my daughter to a salon, and each time, there were lots of tears, and she said it pulled. It took about three hours—very long for an active girl to sit still.

Gradually, I learned to style her hair into puffs, small buns, and twists to avoid the salon. I solicited advice from my Jamaican friend, who styles her girls' hair herself. "You take the hair like this and twist," she explained while demonstrating on my older daughter. "And our hair loves water," she said.

I have been twisting my daughter's hair for several years, and each time it looks better than the last. I can do her hair in one to two hours now. I keep learning more ways to style and care for my daughter's hair, and I am proud when she says, "My mom's my hairdresser."

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defiant behavior and the social constructs he was struggling to conform to? I was collapsing in on myself. And as much as it hurt to admit, I didn't want him to get off the bus! My anxiety and hopelessness, coupled with the escalating rebellion, was beginning to affect my relationship with my only child.

We had tried everything from time-outs to reward systems to taking away privileges, and I didn't know what else to do. At this moment, I realized that I needed help. I couldn't deal with my son's downward spiral in my dejected and depressed state, so I committed to putting my mental health at the top of my priority list. I found myself a therapist and made an appointment with the pediatrician. My son and I have our bad days, but things are finally looking up.



Bottoming Out at the Bus Stop

by Kristin Grego; Gahanna, OH

I LOOKED at the clock—2:36, time to drag myself down to the end of the block to get my kindergarten hoodlum from the bus stop. Anxiety crept over me as I imagined what fresh hell awaited me once he stepped off the bus. Was my 5-year-old cursing on the ride home again? Had he slugged another kid on the playground at recess? How long would the note from his teacher be today?

As I slipped on my shoes and began my reluctant trudge to the bus stop, I wondered silently if things would ever change. Was this the beginning of a lifelong battle between his increasingly



Michael's Big Math Problem

by Marlynn Vayanos; Bridgeville, PA

RAISING a child with type 1 diabetes can have its high and lows...literally. On an ever-changing roller coaster of blood-sugar numbers and carb counting is a normal 7-year-old who loves to play soccer and eat pizza. In fact, Michael does not even remember life without diabetes, since he was diagnosed at age 2, with my husband and me sharing in his continual care. Now that he's school-age and at a point where it is getting harder to be "different," part of Michael's education involves learning to live with this disease and learning self-care. Finding this balance has challenged my parental instinct to shield him from any hardship for as long as possible.

Recently, at a routine pre-meal finger prick, my usually compliant boy let out an exasperated sigh and yelled, "Why do I have to do this? I HATE diabetes!" Despite that heartbreaking instant when any parent feels powerless to take a hurt away, I knew we had to face it head-on. After a hug and the assurance that there was nothing he'd done to create this, I continued, "I know it's not always easy for you, but diabetes is like a big math problem—and you're good at math!"

I saw the pride in his eyes as he perked up and we entered the numbers into his insulin pump together. We are blessed with a child who loves to learn, and involving Michael in his care has made him feel empowered. Helping him to see his strengths in what may seem like a negative situation felt like a win and showed him that this challenge need not hold him back from anything. Instead of shielding him from it, we choose to be honest but upbeat; realistic but hopeful. After all, even little wins can feel like big victories!