

## TWENTY-ONE THINGS I REFUSED TO DO IN ONE AFTERNOON WITH A TODDLER

A day will come when you find yourself home alone with a cranky toddler. No matter how carefully you have planned your life, how much your mother and mother-in-law want to be keeping her, how many consecutive out-of-town jobs you have secured for yourself, there will come a day when you have no way out.

It is raining outside. Your child is whining, making *that noise*. You happen to notice that your household owns no arsenic.

And then your toddler says that you are to wear some bread boats.

“Bread boats,” she says ominously, sounding like Marlon Brando in *The Godfather*. “Bread boats wanna go for a ride.”

If you do not right now have a two-year-old to instruct you, you might not know that bread boats are torn-up pieces of bread, buttered on at least one side, that will be affixed to you so that you can take them for a ride. Your job is to walk around and around the dining room table until the bread boats have had enough. And how long until a piece of bread has had enough, is a question that has perplexed philosophers for centuries. The answer, I think, is as close to infinity as you’re going to find these days.

Okay, so I have done this. I did it for as long as I could stand it, which was up until I noticed that the dining room shades were open and that my neighbors were home. I could picture them nudging each other and her saying to him, “Look over there now, Carl. That child has her wearing little pieces of toast.”

Some people would think this might have been wimpy of me. They would say that I should have drawn my line and insisted, with all my rightful authority as a parent, that this was not going to happen.

What you don’t realize unless you’re the parent of someone of this age and potency is that you are forever drawing your line and threatening with the full force of your parental authority. That same afternoon of the bread boats, I had exerted my authority on twenty-one other things. I even ended up going back into the kitchen and reapplying the butter when the damn things kept falling off—and after closing the shades, I wore them for a few dozen more trips around the table before I suggested that we might eat them as a snack—an idea which was rejected immediately.

But here’s the stuff I didn’t do:

- I said she couldn’t take her nap outside, even if she wore her raincoat.
- I wouldn’t let her sleep with the Elmer’s glue, the black marking pens, the yardstick, or a dinner fork.
- I said no disposable diaper on the cat.

- I refused to take the car keys out of the ignition earlier in the day so she could play with them while I was driving.
- I said we couldn't wear the cat dishes on our heads.
- I would not take the vacuum cleaner outside to suck up all the ants.
- I said that more than twenty Band-Aids on a person with no injuries was excessive and wouldn't be tolerated.
- I said she couldn't wear Daddy's shoes when we went to the store.
- I didn't let her eat butter right out of the container.
- I didn't let her pour the box of corn flakes into the bathtub while the water was running.
- I refused to try to regurgitate a piece of apple I had just eaten, which had just been found to be The Most Wonderful Piece of Apple Ever to Exist in the World.
- I didn't let her throw the desk lamp down the laundry chute.
- I was extremely firm about not allowing the wading pool to come in the kitchen so we could both swim while I cooked dinner.
- I said we couldn't paint our faces with the strawberry yogurt.
- I said no to licking the rain-soaked rocks on the front porch.
- I said we couldn't put the goldfish and the at together on the floor to see who would win in a fight.
- I refused to let her ride her tricycle down the cement stairs.
- I said she couldn't cut her own bangs.
- I said I couldn't *staple* the bread boats to myself, that it was butter or nothing.
- I said we couldn't dump out the soy sauce and drink our apple juice from the soy sauce bottle.
- I wouldn't let her push me in the doll stroller.

So, all in all, I think I'm winning at this parenthood thing.