

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2010

LITERARY MAMA

- [Home](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Creative Nonfiction](#)
- [Fiction](#)
- [Literary Reflections](#)
- [Poetry](#)
- [Profiles](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Blog](#)

SEARCH

KEEP IN TOUCH

-  [E-Zine](#)
-  [Facebook](#)
-  [RSS Feeds](#)
-  [Twitter](#)

LITERARY MAMA

- [About Us](#)
- [Staff](#)
- [Contributors](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Wanted

By [MELISSA CAMARA WILKINS](#)
May 8, 2010

If you were to look into my kitchen right now, you would not notice the floor that needs mopping, or the dishes filling the sink and spilling onto the counters. You wouldn't be distracted by the ceramic fruit bowl full of browning bananas. Your attention wouldn't wander to the three-year-old at the table kneading play-doh, or to the older kids in the next room with their colored pencils and sketchbooks. At this moment, in my kitchen, the only thing you would notice is the screaming toddler.

She's arching her back and tossing her head, flipping blond wisps this way and that as she shrieks. Her eyes are squinched shut and her cheeks bloom pink and blotchy. Her lung capacity astounds me.

Sadie is quite capable, at sixteen months old, of using words and sign language to let us know what she wants or how she feels. But lately, these aren't enough. Every slight, every attempt at redirection ends in screaming. There is no preliminary whimpering, no sobbing, no buildup of any sort. Just immediate, full-volume screaming. She's done this so often in the last week that the older kids no longer notice. I, on the other hand, get a serious boost of adrenaline every time.

I know it's normal for a toddler to be out-of-sorts during a growth spurt or while developing a new skill. If that's the deal, Sadie must be working on something huge. Like calculus. Which she will do in French. While balancing a ball on the end of her nose.

Right now, she's not hurt. She's not sick. Sadie's not even what we optimistically call "frustrated" (that's toddlerspeak for "thwarted and mildly pissed"). At this point, she's beyond frustrated. She is flat-out furious.

WANTED

-  [Comments \(9\)](#)
-  [ShareThis](#)

Melissa Camara Wilkins lives in Southern California with her husband and children. Her work has previously appeared in [Mamazine.com](#), and in the anthology [Mothering and Blogging: The Radical Act of the Mommyblog](#). Learn more at her [website](#), visit her [blog](#), or connect with her on [Twitter](#).

[More from Melissa Camara Wilkins](#)

[Creative Nonfiction Archives](#)

Ads by Google

[The Children's Place](#)

Children's Place Mix & Match Sale. Create Endless Combos, 3 for \$15.

www.childrensplace.com

[Moen Kitchen Sinks](#)

Diverse Styles - Find the Right One to Complement Your Kitchen.

Moen.com/KitchenSinks

[Noonan Family Swim School](#)

Children Love Our Lessons ! San Diego, Del Mar, Murrieta Temecula

www.NoonanFamilySwimSchool.com

[Kraus Kitchen Sinks](#)

Kraus Kitchen Sinks - 15% OFF. Coupon Code: NY15 + Free Shipping.

www.ExpressDecor.com

[Ready to Publish a Book?](#)

Publish With the Industry Leader Get Your Free Book Publishing Guide

www.Xibris.com/WriteAndPublish

I could imagine this being an appropriate response if, say, I had just flushed all the stuffed animals down the toilet, or sent her siblings off to Disneyland without her. What I actually did was this: I sliced an apple and offered her a piece. She didn't want the apple. She wanted the paring knife. I did not oblige.

"You sound angry," I say. "Are you feeling angry?"

"WAAAAAAH," she replies.

Sometimes she can be distracted with a blanket or an offer of milk. Right now, not so much. She will let me scoop her up, let me plant kisses all over her little face, but she will not settle. She rests her cheek on my collarbone, the top of her head tucked under my chin. "Hush," I soothe. "Shhh, shhh." There are no tears involved at all, just loud wailing, over and over again.

What Sadie wants is unreasonable to the point of being ridiculous, but not getting it leaves her breathless and miserable. I can sympathize. How often I want the impossible--and how often do I despair of not achieving it! At least Sadie will recover quickly.

My own list of unrealistic desires continues to grow. I want a perpetually clean house, organized shelves, a functional desk, paint without fingerprints on the walls, and for all of that to maintain itself while we work and play. I want my kids to be free to explore and imagine and create, but I don't want to pick glitter out of my couch cushions for the next week. I want to arrive on time to playgroup, to church, to a birthday dinner at my parents' house, appropriately attired and with each of my children in possession of both their own shoes. I want time to write while the kids are napping, but since my free time is limited, I want to turn out sparkling prose on the first pass. I want the apple, I want the knife, I want, I want, I want.

I've mostly outgrown screaming as the default reaction to seeing my impossible dreams deterred, but I can identify with the impulse.

I'd like to give my child space to express her feelings, even if we do have to operate within the realm of the possible most of the time. It might be best if I could teach her to let go of her desires and radiate contentment, but I think I'm a little too familiar with her predicament to lead the way down that enlightened path. Maybe the next best thing for her is having someone who will bear witness to her frustrations, someone to acknowledge her difficulties? That, at least, I can do.

Back in the kitchen, Sadie is still angry, but I think she's ready to move on. I pace with her in my arms, swaying back and forth as I go. I'm about to suggest a new direction--let's play blocks! or trains! or anything at all!--when she reaches for a dish of leftover spaghetti on the counter. I swoop her out of range. Already this morning she pulled her sister's breakfast bowl off the kitchen table, sending a swath of oatmeal arcing spectacularly toward the ceiling and splattering a wall of framed pictures on its way.

I know where this is going, with the dish of spaghetti--I can imagine the sauce splashed over the floor, the cabinets, my ankles--but Sadie wants what she wants. Her lip is trembling again.



Literary Mama is a proud member of the following organizations:



The International Mothers Network



The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses

"I hear you," I say. "I hear you."

COMMENTS

Oh Melissa, I love this, and I can absolutely relate.
Posted by **kate hopper** on May 9, 2010

Love this, Melissa! And I must now away to my screaming toddler...
Posted by **Anjali** on May 10, 2010

Well said, Melissa.
We want what we want, from clean counters to swapped lives, from toddlerhood to, I imagine, our dotage. Sometimes I think the toddlers have the right idea - just scream your head off till it passes!
Posted by **Lisa Romeo** on May 10, 2010

Totally relatable!
Posted by **Tricia** on May 10, 2010

Wow! This is a perfect description of how so many of us feel during our lives. I know that I often want something so bad that screaming for it seems sensible. But, alas, when you reach the age of, say, 3 this is no longer acceptable. At least that's what I try and tell every 3-year-old I encounter.
Posted by **Amber** on May 10, 2010

Well said, Melissa. Thanks for helping me remember how to honor the child in this way. Reminds me of the adage "we detest in others what we most detest in ourselves." I mean, who hasn't wanted to cry cause she couldn't have just one more brownie?
Posted by **Abi** on May 10, 2010

I didn't realize how much I had in common with children until I had them. Funny how growing up sometimes means suppressing those childish urges instead of losing them. Great piece!
Posted by **Diana** on May 11, 2010

Beautiful. I wish I'd written this. Congratulations on getting pen to paper in the midst of raising children!
Posted by **Kristen** on May 11, 2010

I love this. It's so beautifully written, and so, so true. Wonderful job.
Posted by **Heather** on May 11, 2010

[Leave Comment](#)
