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#107 Arizona, June 2014, Perfectionist,

(Help Joelle – can you please cut some more of my 1003 words?)

Dear Arizona,

I'm kind of a perfectionist. Whenever I write or draw something and it doesn't look perfect, I have to erase it and start all over again. Do you have any ideas on how to feel better about my mess-ups?

Perfectionist in Pasadena

Dear Perfectionist, I can totally get that way. And this might sound strange, but my Dad's the one who actually helped me relax a little about that stuff!

"This year I'm making Dad the most special father's day card ever!" I said. "It's going to be a collage!"

"Oh that's a good idea," said my little brother Tex. "You're doing a collage card like the ones you made all of us for Christmas!"

"Those were so cool!" Said my sister Indi.

"Darn it!" I said, slamming my magazine down. "I completely forgot about those! Oh well, so much for that new and entirely original idea!"

"Hey you know what?" Said my Mom. "I came across this neat watercolor set when I was sorting through my old things."

"I want to do it!" Said Indi.

"Me too!" Said Tex.

"We have lots of brushes and paper," said my mom. "How bout we all give it a try?"

My mom made this blue, yellow and green crisscross pattern, Indi made a garden of flowers and Tex painted our family.

"That's awesome," I said. "But what are those two little blobs?"

"Those aren't blobs," he frowned. "Those are our cats Cow and Charlie!"

I ended up painting something my mom said was called a still life. That's apparently what it's called when you draw or paint a real thing that's right in front of you. It was our fruit bowl with grapes and apples and bananas. I worked and worked to make it perfect. Then I worked and worked to make it even more perfect!

The next morning, I made a checklist to make sure everything went right. Cereal? Check! Spoon? Check! Blueberries? Check! Napkin? Check! And last but not least, one extra tall glass of Dad's favorite home made fresh squeezed orange juice – which by the way takes forever to make? Check!

We put all of our super special watercolor paintings in a neat row right above Dad's placemat.

"Close your eyes," we said, leading him to the table. "Okay, now you can open your eyes!"

"Wow!" He said. "Look at this delicious looking breakfast! And Look at the most amazing father's day cards I've ever seen!"

"We used Mommy's old watercolors," said Tex. "And just in case you're wondering those two little blobs are Charley and Cow."

"Well anyone can see that!" My Dad said, reaching for the extra tall glass of orange juice. "You can tell by the whiskers and tails!"

Unfortunately, the thing that happened next was not on my checklist. My Dad accidentally knocked over the glass and completely soaked his cards!

"Woops!" He said. "I'm afraid I just turned your watercolors into orangejuice colors!"

We tried to grab towels and dry them off, but it didn't help at all.

"Hmm," said Tex. "Now Charley and Cow really do just look like blobs."

"And my garden of flowers looks more like seaweed in an orange ocean," said Indi.

Everyone was doing their best to stay upbeat and make my Dad feel as unterribly as possible about wrecking the cards. And I tried to do that too. Really I did! But that was my first ever still life watercolor painting and I worked so crazily hard to make it perfect, and I even thought it was half way decent art-wise. And now, you couldn't even tell what it was supposed to be. And well, no matter how hard I was trying to say something nice, the only things that ended up coming out were tears!

But my Dad is the master of looking on the bright side. He always says, "When life gives you lemons make lemonade!" And in this case, "When orangejuice turns your perfect masterpiece into a drippy, unrecognizable mess, enjoy the surprise!"

"I loved your original painting Zonykins," he said, putting his arm around my shoulder. "But believe it or not, I like this new version just as much! We work so hard trying to make things perfect. But sometimes mistakes end up being these magical little gifts that unexpectedly transform things in fantastic and surprising new ways!"

"I don't exactly understand what you mean," said Tex.

"I think I do," I said, wiping the tears off my cheek. "Even though accidents and mistakes might seem terrible at first, they can actually end up being okay."

"Or better than okay!" My Dad said. "Wait here, I have something to show you!"

He came back carrying a great big book.

"This is a fantastic collection of abstract art," he said "And this is one of my all time favorite paintings by a guy named Jackson Pollock."

"But it's not even a picture of anything!" Said Indi.

"It's just a bunch of drips and splatters!" Said Tex.

"And I love it!" Said Dad. "Art doesn't have to look like something. I like the way all these cool splatters and drips make me feel. And I get the same kind of feeling from these wonderful, orange-juicey father's day cards!"

After that, we ate breakfast and spent the whole rest of the morning painting a bunch of cool abstract art. And you probably won't be all that surprised to hear that instead of mixing the paint with water, my whacky dad used orange juice!

So Dear Perfectionist, if you're like me, you're probably always going to work extra hard to make things as good as you can. But once in a while, you might want to try taking my Dad's advice and let yourself make a mistake or two. I've been trying to remember that the world won't end if I mess up a little sometimes. And when I need reminding, I go take a look at my Dad's favorite father's day cards that he keeps on his desk.

Ciao for Now,
Arizona

