

My Heavenly-Horrific Vision of TCS

Submitted by Sarah Fitz-Claridge on 21 July, 2003 - 08:42

...or How I Ran Screaming In Panic

Suzanna Slack

Here are some things I thought would make me TCS:

Well, first of all, I immediately panicked, reading a lot of posts on the [TCS List](#), and thought I would need to be rich.

My first thoughts were wild, crazy visions involving fast-food restaurants and cable television. I thought it would cost me a fortune to buy my children McDonalds for every meal, and Coca-Cola, and to sign up for cable tv. A mobile phone for each of them so they could be picked up whenever they went anywhere without me and got bored before the allotted time. All that brand-new Barbie merchandise they spotted in the shops and just *had to have* was going to clean me out, too. Not to mention those puppies and those ponies!

What else? Oh, and I'd have to work out a way of living somewhere better. Fast. I couldn't possibly take my children seriously in a small inner-city flat. We'd have to move to the suburbs, so we could still capitalise on all the benefits the city had to offer, but also be near lots of open spaces and countryside. We would obviously need a garden, so that the kids could explore all kinds of outdoor activities like rollerblading and basketball on their own premises as well as in a nice safe street with not many cars and no crime. And a paddock for those ponies. But how would I afford enough space to take the ponies seriously, too? They'd need freshwater streams and endless hills to gallop freely through. Oops, but I digress.

My children would have to live somewhere as splendid and all-purpose as this, otherwise their growth would be impeded. And they should live somewhere they could invite their friends over without their autonomy being interfered with, ever, at all. We would need a bigger fridge, one of those ones which dispense ice and cold water, with enough space to keep all those child-friendly foodstuffs and delicious things to help themselves and their friends too. The kitchen would need to be open-plan and huge, to facilitate the preparation of whatever they liked to eat.

They would need a room of their own, of course (with their own TV, video and DVD in each, oh and a CD player of course, and other equipment that would come up soon, like a Playstation...).

And a large family room with a piano and a computer (preferably two computers, no – wait! preferably enough computers for everyone in the house to be able to use one whenever they wanted...so let me think, we'd need some kind of up-to-date state of the art Broadband is it called? system that enabled us to use the telephone as well)....

A huge table, in this family room, to make a mess on. And access to all the things to help them make a mess with: all the craft activities they could lay their hands on, any type of foodstuffs to experiment with cooking, all kinds of science

materials and basically anything to experiment in any way with. At any time. They should not be denied anything. Repeat after me: THEY SHOULD NOT BE DENIED ANYTHING.

I was exhausted just thinking about it all. I was filled with dread. But also with a curious kind of excitement. Picturing this future vision of family harmony had brought to the surface of my mind a whole host of capitalist and anti-capitalist demons. I realised that I was confusing TCS with something else, a political battle I was having with the world that had nothing to do with my children and everything to do with my own childhood. So I examined that (and I won't do so here because it's tedious). I also realised that the control that I had been exerting in my household was a sort of will-to-poverty that I thought was somehow wholesome or 'better'. Suddenly, with all these visions of a huge, wealthy open-house spilling out happy, affluent kids dancing before my eyes, I started to doubt whether my purist ideals were useful after all.

But I was still pretty horrified by this vision of affluence I had called up. It was as if life had to be all or nothing, good or bad: You either go without and have occasional treats (therefore you are a good person),

or you get rich, indulge your every whim and become a kind of capitalist demon. Like I say, I had to realise that this stuff was mine and had nothing to do with either my kids or reality. So after examining all of that I did stop panicking and trying to work out how I could earn a lot of money in a short time so that we could all ship out to the suburbs and be totally different people.

We're not different people, and I don't want to become different people. I still have beliefs about money and wealth that I am happy with – but I am now much more willing to re-examine and cast doubt upon them. Constantly. Going to fast-food outlets doesn't cost more than organic food. Both are expensive. Eating out is expensive, full stop, but it is something that various members of my family wish to incorporate into their lives regularly, so we aim for that. Having really nice food at home, healthy food *and* not healthy food, often means that we are happy to stay at home or to invite people over and so we save money that we otherwise might have spent earnestly zooming around and trying to improve ourselves. It *is* quite improving, after all, to hang about with your family eating your favourite food. But it's still TCS, whatever that means, to have no juice left in the fridge and only water out of the tap to drink, and not so much as a boring old rice cake to eat. Because 'being TCS' doesn't involve being superhuman. Sometimes we run out of nice things to eat because we're all too busy doing the things we like doing. The TCS response to that is to go to the shops and acquire the things everyone wants, the wonderful mix of the good the bad and the ugly and to discuss how much we all want to spend and what we can do about acquiring more money so we can spend more someday.

We still can't provide a room for each child, but drawing pictures of the ideal house and talking about it helps. Altering the place where we live to try to facilitate more privacy and more autonomy is, I think, one indication that we take the whole issue seriously. Not getting too stressed about moving into our Ideal Home helps, because a stressed family is a pretty useless one.

So ditto about the computer each and the TV and the CD and DVD player and the mobile phone each, or whatever it was. Looking for ways to help everyone get what they want, using their access to those things we *do* have, is more educational. Listening to what other people want and seeking common preferences is exhausting, and sometimes it can amount to just a different way of saying 'life is tough, you have to learn to go without'.

It can, but it shouldn't. We still prefer the idea of having more of these items, but we also like the career choices we've made, and I don't think it's TCS for me to chuck in the choices I've made to get a high-paid job just to pay for more technology in our home. My kids would miss me – they'd prefer me to their own computers and TVs, and even to cable tv. But it's important that I mean it when I say I want them to have their own things, as well as that I want them to give their sibling a turn on the computer because their sibling had to go without a turn before because I'm so damn luddite I couldn't get the game to work.

I also mean it when I say sometime I'd like to do a course because it's no use having a luddite mum when computers are part of our life and I don't want to wait for my kids to have to teach *me* how to do stuff. I want us all to learn together.

What else? It *is* affordable to provide as many interesting glittery things as you can for kids to make stuff whenever they want. If your home is small, like mine, its not affordable – on some level – for the place to be trashed always. Yes, a specially designated ‘messy creative’ room would be ideal, but if you haven’t got one, in the meantime its also not ideal to have a mother who doesn’t want to vacuum up glitter and playdough three times a day and starts getting pissy about it. She could pay for a cleaner, but actually she’d still be cleaning up glitter and also pancake experiments more often than she likes and paying for the cleaner might set us further back from that big house with the crime-free streets outside where we can all rollerblade in the summer sunset....

I realise that common preferences isn’t just about me finding ways for everyone to go to the cinema and to McDonalds and to buy new Barbies, its also about *my kids* learning to find ways for *me* to have to Hoover up the glitter a bit less, and not to have to clean up ‘witches porridges’ (don’t ask, anyway I’m sure it’s a violation of privacy).

There is a temptation to respond to the ideas of TCS with immediate self-sacrifice. Oh woe is me, how can I provide my poor deprived lambs with the things they don’t have? I shall Go Without and Suffer, that’s how. And what’s more, I’ll call it TCS. Ugh. It’s not.

We bought the piano. A man who lives locally does all the science experiments at his wonderfully-equipped house. If I tried, I’d just be self-sacrificing, because I haven’t a clue. We go to free lectures at the Royal Institution so I can learn a bit about it myself, with them. The rest is in a slow state of happening. Might be a lifetime slow. I might not live in the TCS palace I described until I’m a grandmother, but I realise now my kids won’t bitch about it and say they were deprived of such a home when they were small.

When I was at school I noticed that people without much money often gave their kids more things they wanted than the richer parents did. As an explanation my mother snobbishly simply said that this was “a working class thing”. Made me wish my dad was a postman instead, so I could eat the food I liked and get more toys and more holidays in places that were more ordinary but more fun. I don’t want to say too much about class, but I do think there is a pseudo-liberal and very middle-class trend to go without the fun stuff of life in order to achieve the big stuff of life. Like big draughty houses or holidays in boring parts of Tuscany. Or private schools that no-one wants to go to. And so on.

I think children *do* understand that you have pension plans and a penchant for designer underwear, especially if you understand their love of cartoons (which would make a cartoon cable channel make sense),

their desire to use as much PVA glue as they can every single day until they hit nine and never look at the stuff again, their love of Buffy the Vampire Slayer and all its related merchandise.....whatever. It might ostensibly seem like throwing money down the drain, but its not. I really see that its possible to rethink ‘wasting’ money, and to rethink capitalism as well.

We go without the things not everyone wants (that might mean living somewhere smaller, even, or living somewhere cheaper, or not going to Tuscany for one year if everyone would prefer a camp site in Wales and to get a CD player each) to help everyone have *more*. In the long run, we end up spending less.

It seems so complicated, thanks to our terribly contorted and deluded brains, but in fact it’s so simple. Money is one of the areas of life where we suffer a huge amount of self-coercion, but by paying attention to our children’s wants, we can learn a hell of a lot from them. Before we dump all that confusion onto them, listen to their desires for bubblegum rather than a trip to the museum, and discover how to save money by spending it and discover how to learn differently, better, and be happy too.

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Comments

Brilliant

Submitted by a TCS reader (not verified) on 21 July, 2003 - 11:27

Suzanna, this is wonderful. Thanks for writing it. You reminded me all over again of the excitement that wild ideas can bring, along with the panic. The trick, I think, is to allow oneself to think, "What would be great?" at different times, and to use that as a source of great ideas, rather than a measure of perfection with which to tyrannise ourselves.

Alice

[to post comments](#)

Hear hear

Submitted by Terra on 24 July, 2003 - 22:03

I second Alice's comment. Suzanna, you're so right and so perceptive. I love the way you guys question things so honestly and insightfully.

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Even though it's not quite th

Submitted by Relsqui (not verified) on 4 December, 2004 - 08:15

Even though it's not quite the same situation, there's someone I desperately want to print this for.

He's extraordinarily sweet, loves my creativity, and often tells me how much he wishes he could buy me all the art supplies I'll ever need (instead of worrying about which groceries we can live without).

I'm not sure whether I think his priorities are a bit off, or if he thinks mine are, or if both of our heads are on straight and it's just wishful thinking. Either way, maybe this'll help me convince him not to worry about it.

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I've only just begun to explo

Submitted by Bev (not verified) on 7 February, 2005 - 12:27

I've only just begun to explore TCS, following up on what I have read in 'Doing It Their Way' by Jan Fortune Wood. To be totally honest I have been in an upset state of blind panic, loving the 'theory' yet more or less sure that I could not manage to cope with the practical reality. Thank goodness I had the determination to keep reading and thinking!!

Suzanna, this is a wonderful piece of writing, which has allowed many things to fall into place for me!! Thank you so much for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings on the issue!

I now feel (am I right?) that TCS is about each of us - not just the children! - having the right to our own preferences, along with the freedom to make our own choices WITHIN the possibilities open to us, taking into consideration and working with family dynamics, living space, available funds and time etc. This I can do!!

I am still entitled to my own preferences, values and feelings - each is totally valid - but I must remember that others may not always agree or feel the same way. In fact, with regard to more irrational views, it is at times important to work hard at not passing these 'hang ups' on to my children. That said, my feelings are still valid feelings and I do not feel the need to deny or belittle myself any more. I am only human after all! TCS is just that in essence isn't it - being true to oneself and recognising that it is vitally important that our children have the freedom to do the same!!

To a great extent we already follow TCS thinking. I am constantly hoarse with talking - explaining, reasoning, discussing, finding solutions and working out 'common preferences' (though I didn't realise that's what we were doing until now!!). I do still find myself getting tense, upset and (unfortunately) loud at some points... "Well you CAN'T" or "I'm sorry but you will HAVE to". I'm really working on it though!! I guess it will get easier with practice, as we grow and I learn to relax!

Thank you again, Bright Blessings to you all.

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