

Is That a Leg Sticking Out Of Your Purse??

Having a child with a limb difference has its difficult moments, but it also has its funny moments. I am a person who enjoys laughing, as does my daughter. So we have fun in our family. There are the little things, because she only has three fingers on one of her hands, her older brothers will tell her to slap them three, instead of five.

One of the funnier moments came before my daughter received her first pair of prosthetic legs. I was in a grocery store trying to get the shopping done before my older children got out of school. I was, as usual, preoccupied with trying to remember if I had forgotten anything. I was putting my mountain of groceries onto the conveyer belt and paying little attention to the grandmotherly woman who was talking to my daughter. I was aware of her, but since she didn't seem dangerous, I was not really paying attention to the words she was saying.

Finally, however, as I put the last item on the belt, the words began to seep into my brain. My daughter was sitting cross-legged in the seat and was wearing a little dress with a full skirt. This is important, because one could not see her legs at all in that position and in that outfit. The words coming out of this woman's mouth that finally seeped into my brain were playful. She was pretending she was going to tickle my daughter, and saying in that syrupy voice people love to use with children, "Where's that foot? I'm going to get that foot! Where are those little toes?"

Just as I opened my mouth to say something, my daughter who loves to be tickled, stuck out her right leg. The problem is that at the end of her right leg, there is no foot and there are no toes. I watched as this woman's face went from amusement to shock to embarrassment. Before I could say a word, she had slunk off to another register. I was unsure of how to react. My daughter was laughing hysterically, and part of me wanted to as well, though another part felt so sorry for that poor woman, who no doubt wanted the floor to open up so she could jump in. The clerk, who had seen all this, was struggling not to laugh, and soon I was, too. I was trying very hard to be the adult, but it sure was funny!

Later my daughter got her first pair of prosthetic legs, pink with pictures of ballet shoes. I just knew she would love them! Imagine my shock when she hated them the first time we put them on her. However she learned to walk in them and even to like them most of the time.

The problem was she also learned to take them off. When she was wearing shorts or a dress, this was not a problem, we simply popped them back on, but long pants are another story. So there were many times when I would stick one or two of her prosthetic legs into my purse and carry my daughter. Some of the double takes I got, when the sneaker clad feet were sticking out of my purse, were priceless.

Of course, she soon turned two and began to use the legs as part of her tantrums. I would be in a grocery store, staring at some item, trying to figure out which brand is cheaper by doing the math in my head, when I would hear a clunk at my feet. I would look down and see a leg on the floor; I would calmly pick it up and continue my shopping. This of course led to interesting expressions on the faces of my fellow shoppers. The legs made a loud noise when they landed and of course got everyone's attention. Of course if I forgot to remove a leg from the grocery cart, the poor clerks

would end up with a nice surprise. One picked it up and asked for a price check! I told her forget it, that thing cost more than she made.

Another time my daughter attended story time at the library with a friend. A woman was trying to educate the group of preschoolers on how people are different. I believe she is the one who got the education that day. She made a statement that while people might be different, with different eye, hair, and skin colors, we are all the same because we all have ten fingers and ten toes. My daughter's friend spoke right up! "She doesn't!" she yelled, as my daughter held up her smaller hand. I wasn't there and had to hear the story second hand, but I was told that the two girls were laughing so hard at this poor woman's misinformation about the world that they had to be removed from story time.

Of course, not only is having a child with limb differences great for entertainment purposes, but prosthetics make great tools. Just the other day I was at a big superstore – you know the one, where you can't ever find an employee when you need help – when I really wanted an item on the top shelf. I tried and tried to reach it. Finally I removed my daughter's leg and used it to knock the item off the top shelf. It took me several tries and all of my concentration, so I didn't notice the audience that had gathered to watch. That is, until I got my item, and put my daughter's foot back on her and thanked her. One lady asked me where she could get one of those, pointing to my daughter's bright purple legs and everyone began to laugh. I remember someone once asking me if it was depressing to have a child with a difference. If only she knew!