

The long days and short years of raising children

Sam doesn't want to be 2. Oh, he still likes all the usual 2-year-old things. He adores his Thomas the Tank Engine and his favorite music group is still The Wiggles. He still takes a nap some afternoons. He's still prone to curl up for a snuggle in the evenings when bedtime is getting nigh.

But beyond that ... he wants to be more.

Bigger, faster, braver, more independent. He wants to be with the big kids. Already, he wants to do it all.

We were all at our local playground on one recent sunny afternoon, just as the adjacent elementary and middle school let classes out for the day with the usual ensuing stampede.

Jimmy — who already goes to school and was more intent on getting a spot on the swings — was unimpressed ... but Sam, well, his eyes widened as he saw the crowd coming. A chortle emerged as he ran after the big kids, intent on being right in the middle of their group, mindless of the possibility of being

“Slow down, you move too fast. You got to make the morning last ...”

— **“The 59th Street Bridge Song” by Simon And Garfunkel**

trampled.

As the herd outran him, he instead paused — then ran over to a piece of far-too-large-for-him (by mommy standards) playground equipment, scrabbling up the ladder like a little blond squirrel, out of the reach of my extended hands within the space of a heartbeat.

Fortunately for my nerves, his goal was the slide ... the tallest one at the playground. Not for him, the small slides intended for children his age, or even the medium slides. No, he had to go for the big one.

I dashed to the other side, to the base of that slide, and stood for a moment looking up at this beaming little boy who stood at the top of the tall, tall slide. There wasn't an ounce of fear in that grin.

We stood like that for a moment — then he popped

down and shot down it like a rocket, crashing into me, then wriggling out of my arms with a squeal of glee — and heading right back around the climbing equipment to do it again

“Slow down!” I yelled after him. He didn't.

Plans can change for whatever reason, but by all intention at this moment, Sam is my last child. There are days I miss the baby months (otherwise known as the stay-where-you-put-em months), and I'm still known to crane my neck and smile at a glimpse of a tiny one while we're out at the mall or walking. But, mostly, I'm at peace with that.

Sometimes, though, it's tough to see my “baby” as he hurtles himself through his days with such utter abandon ... and a supreme lack of anything resembling caution. He see what's in front of him and goes after it

with everything he has. And that's probably a good thing.

But sometimes I just want to say, slow down. You'll get there. Slow down. Appreciate these days.

After his older brother got up from the table one night after reviewing his ABCs and reading words with me, Sam climbed up and plopped himself down in the same chair, expectation on his face. OK, then, I thought, picking up the ABC cards. Let's see what you've got.

He got everyone of the letters right ... and spelled out the words for me even if he didn't know what they were. Where did my baby go, again?

We've enrolled him this past week in a summer program, followed by preschool this fall. And while I'm very pleased at that — he's going to love it — in another way, I'm sad.

In some ways, it seems impossible that he's only almost 2. In some ways, I think ... where did the years go?

A friend whose son is graduating from high school this



DOUBLE TROUBLE

month wrote on Facebook recently about the “long days, short years” of parenthood, about how fast the time goes by.

My kids are younger, but I can understand that. I'm never going to have a toddler again. I want to savor the energy, the discovery, the sheer exuberance of the age. Meanwhile, Sam is chugging toward “preschooler” with every ounce of his being.

I want to tell him to slow down. To appreciate it. Even while I know that's never going to happen.

But that's OK.

I'll appreciate it for him.

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