

Angela Mollard

Reflections for the selfie generation



Girls can't truly enjoy life's pure, shiny moments – being mischievous, silly and unchecked – when they're always worried about what they look like in them

DARLING girls,

I know you won't listen to me so I'm writing this in the hope one of your friends will see it and say, "Hey, that was really interesting what your mum wrote", and you'll find it and stick it above your bed to refer to in the years ahead.

Ha ha, fat chance ...

The thing is, sweethearts, I've recently discovered something completely life-changing – something more important than being a good listener and drinking eight glasses of water a day and taking your makeup off every night (which is a total bore, incidentally).

What I've learned, somewhat belatedly, is that perfectionism is a sham.

I can see you thinking this is just another of those Boring Things That Grown-ups Say,

but here's a genuinely interesting fact: in all the very best moments in my life there were no mirrors around.

That's right. After I gave birth to each of you I didn't look in a mirror for days. I didn't care what I looked like because I was too busy gazing at your squidgy little faces.

When I climbed to Everest Base Camp I didn't see my own reflection for three weeks. Apparently there was a spot on my chin of Himalayan proportions but what I remember is the mountains and the shy Nepalese kids and the lovely ache from properly using my legs.

Likewise, every beach holiday, no mirrors – just the freedom of unstructured days and the crunch of salt in my hair. And the folk festival each December – climbing out of the

tent into the sunshine; laughing as I brushed my teeth in the middle of a field.

Professionally, too, there were never mirrors to illuminate the successes: those times when families trusted me to tell their stories; the occasions when my sentences danced effortlessly from my tapping fingers; that time I won an award (although I probably should've had a mirror to counsel against the hideous spiral perm).

I'm telling you this, precious girls, because your generation is never without a mirror. The device, rarely far from your fingers, can show you every second of the day what you look like; what others look like. I see the comparing and despairing, the desire to be "liked", the insidious Instagram filters that transform the lovely "ordinary" into manufactured "extraordinary".

In and of themselves, mirrors are not a problem – actually they're fantastically useful when you have spinach stuck in your teeth. But when you come to rely on them, along with all the other parapher-

nal of perfectionism – A grades, compliments, a faultless work ethic, excessive grooming, a fear of failure – they'll destroy your happiness.

What I've realised, girls, is that you'll never arrive at "perfect". It's a name for a place that doesn't exist and no amount of striving or depriving will ever get you there.

It's something men understand. As poet Philip Larkin wrote in a poem dedicated to Sally Amis, daughter of his best friend, Kingsley: "May you be ordinary; Have, like other women, An average of talents." Anything else, he went on, could "pull you off your balance" and thwart, what he called, a "catching of happiness".

Oh darlings, it's that "catching of happiness" that matters. Recognising the shiny moments for how they feel not what they look like. Fully inhabiting the joy. Being mischievous and silly and unchecked.

Yet the statistics come daily now, a constant drizzle of dismay: half of girls aged 17 to 21 dissatisfied by their appearance; a quarter of females aged 16 to 24 depressed and anxious; eight in 10 girls opting out of

RIDE OUT THE STORM

Just when you thought fashion's black hole had gobbled up all the most heinous items from the 1980s – shoulder pads, scrunchies, leg warmers – news comes that stirrup pants have been regurgitated. The nasty equestrian-meets-aerobics look has apparently resurfaced for the northern hemisphere winter, which means they'll be in Zara here by February.

My advice – leave them to the tweens. As with any look, if you wore something the first time round give it a wide berth ever after.

nature, creativity and the families that love you.

Yes, there will be hard times, failures, a C minus, pimples, bad hair, criticism and rejection but they will give you mettle for when you need it.

I'll leave you with this from writer Anna Quindlen who points out that the small stuff equips you for when something bad happens. "You will have lost someone you loved, or failed at something at which you badly want to succeed," she writes. "And sitting there, you will fall into the centre of yourself. You will look for some core to sustain you. And if you have been perfect all your life and have managed to meet all the expectations of your family, your friends, your community, your society, chances are excellent that there will be a black hole where that core ought to be."

Darlings, let's fill your cores – and mine – with glorious imperfection.

Love Mum.

angelamollard@gmail.com

activities and time with those they love because they don't feel good about how they look.

We parents desperately want something to blame – social media, advertising, celebrities. As UK writer Allison Pearson wrote this week of Kim Kardashian: "How do I hate thee, Kim? You and others like you who have imprisoned the most liberated generation of young women who ever lived in a distorting hall of mirrors."

But, girls, there will always be a Kim. Or a Kendall. Rather, you need to laugh in the face of corrosive perfectionism, unshackle occasionally from social media and nourish yourselves with humour,

I BET TRUMP CITES BILL

With the second American presidential debate taking place tomorrow, it'll be interesting to see if Donald Trump keeps his word. The Republican contender has said he does not plan to bring up Bill Clinton's sexual history during the debate, something he'd threatened if Hillary Clinton continued to comment on his negative remarks about women over the years. Fact is, it's Hillary up for election, not Bill. That said, I'd bet my tax bill – yes, the one I actually paid – he won't get to November without mentioning it.

