

# Down Home: Smudges or symbols of love?

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The screen on my laptop is a smudgy mess. And I don't intend to clean it up.

My friends and family who just read those sentences probably think I'm coming down with something. They know I'm fastidious, which is a \$5 word for obsessive-compulsive, which is a psychological term for just-plain-nuts.

Thing is, I like things to be neat. And clean, too. But neat is better.

You know folks like me are twisted because we prefer neat over clean. If you're smart and scientific and rational, you want stuff to be clean. If something is clean, then it's probably not toxic. You won't catch horribleness by touching it and then bringing your hand within a foot of your face.

## **Takes one to know one**

But a preference for neatness is altogether different. If you think things have to be neat and orderly all the time, then there's a better than even chance something is not neat and orderly inside your noggin'. I'm neither a psychologist nor the son of a psychologist, but I think compulsion to keep things properly arranged reflects an inordinate need to corral chaos. Where does that theory come from? Let's just say it takes one to know one.

The smartest person I've ever met—and I won't tell you his name, because he's not only smart but modest—keeps one mess of a desk. And if you think his desk is a wreck, then just look at his credenza. Not to mention the couch across the room. But his mind is as neat and sharp as a pin. He even

keeps a note about the relationship between cluttered desks and clear minds pinned on the wall. It's there, even if sometimes obscured by stacks of papers.

I'm jealous, of course. I wish I were like him. Still, I can't stop from arranging my desk before I go home in the evening. It's spare. Ordered. Practically perfect in every way. I shudder to consider what my friend thinks my mind must be like.

### **A personal aberration**

So, my messy computer screen represents a personal aberration. Maybe even liberation.

Almost every day, I pull out one of those microfiber wipes—the soft cloths optometrists give you to clean your glasses—and remove all the fingerprints and marks from that screen.

Right now, a thick, waxy collage of smudges covers a triangle-shaped section, about a quarter of the screen. I haven't touched it to check, but I'd just about bet it's sticky, too.

And I don't have the slightest desire to wipe it down.

It reminds me of a little boy.

The other day, Joanna and I drove from our home in Coppell down to Buda to spend part of the weekend with our grandson, Ezra, and his mama and daddy. We had a ball. It was our best visit in that little guy's two years and seven months on this planet.

Here's unswaddled truth: Little kids improve with age. Babies get all the hoopla, but let's talk turkey. Baby-time is overrated. I mean, really. For months, all they do is eat, cry, burp, poop and sleep. They're cuddly and sweet, all right, but it's hard to have much of a relationship with a baby.

## **Starting to jabber**

But when a child starts to jabber? Well, that's nothing short of a hoot. Ezra's like a word magnet. He can say lots of things, and he'll try to say anything. Even when his pronunciation falls somewhere shy of English, you pretty well know exactly what he means.

So, Jo and I thoroughly enjoyed talking to Ezra—or, more exactly, listening to Ezra talk. We also went swimming, choo-chooed trains on the living room floor, played at two parks, ate donuts, blew bubbles and shot water guns.

OK, I try not to be an over-the-top granddad. I don't foist pictures of Ezra on friends. I think he's a handsome little fellow, but he's probably no better looking to you than your grandkid is to me. He's smart as a Baby Einstein, of course, but your child might be, too.

The difference is Ezra is my grandson. We both smile when he enters the room. I can make him laugh, which makes me happier than words have the power to describe.

## **I'm keeping the smudges**

I don't want to wipe those smudgy fingerprints off my computer screen because Ezra put them there. For about an hour, he sat in my lap, and we watched videos: Thomas the Train. The Chuggingtons. Mickey Mouse in English, Spanish and Russian, of course. A few others I can't remember.

When a video ended—which wasn't necessarily when the story was over but when Ezra wanted to watch something else—he reached up and touched the YouTube icon of the video he wanted to see next.

That's how my screen became a smudgy mess.

Just the way I like it.