**First Place: A Clean Home is a Happy Home**

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We have all heard of the proverb ‘Cleanliness is next to Godliness.’ Many of us follow it and many of us tend to ignore it. I happen to live with a person who makes *that proverb* her ‘*Mantra.*’ Yes, it is none other than my mother. For her the best inventions in life are not the iPads and iPhones but the *new hands-free faucets* that we find in the restrooms these days!

Her day revolves around order, discipline and neatness. Everything at home has a designated place. For instance, if I was taking a break in between my studies and I left the books on my table, my mother will remind me in many ways, that my table was untidy. She would first tell me politely. Then she would emotionally try to put it across and when that fails, she would threaten me. There are days when that does not work too. Those days you ought to be very careful. She would just come into the room to organize your table and would end up cleaning our *rather clean* bookshelf. We would have to spend at least an hour cleaning our folders and organizing our stationary! The pens in one slot. The pencils, all sharpened, in another. The erasers will have to be picked up from under all the folders and arranged neatly. The u-clips need to be segregated into silver, black and golden. By the time we would be done, we would be tired repenting as to why we did not clean our table in the first place. My mother, she would be thrilled and rather cheerful!

Using our bathroom is another very complicated scenario. The towels need to be hung neatly with the front and the back pleat in line. There is a position for everything in the bathroom. The handwash, the toothbrushes, the shampoos and many other small trinkets that make the bathroom an elegant place.

Now imagine the morning rush when everybody is trying to go to work or to school. My mom will rush in to get things organised, telling us that she was *disappointed* and that she just could not imagine as to how any of us were going to be able to live in homes of our own.

The best things happen to us when we travel, especially to India. I distinctly remember this one time she got off at the airport and excused herself to use the washroom, directing us to wait with our father. It was well over ten minutes and we were getting worried. My father asked me to check on her. As I pushed open the door, I saw a lady standing in a *karate position*, absolutely flustered but waiting patiently. She asked me as to what had taken me so long and before I could figure out what was happening, she would edge her way out of the restroom, advising me to wash my hands and to use our tissues to open the door as there were none in the washroom.

Another instance that comes to my mind is the restaurant we went to these winter holidays. As we were visiting temples, we ended up having a late breakfast and we were all ravenous. The small hotel that we got in for breakfast was far from what my mother had in mind. The three of us sat at one table and my father conveniently sat at another. My mom told us to keep our hands off the table and as we held it in mid-air, the owner of the restaurant came in to take our orders. He looked rather boggled seeing us in a ‘*praying mantis*’ like pose. He ignored us and asked our father as to what he wanted and was rather surprised when my father said that we were all together. The food was served on banana leaves which did impress my mother, but her appetite was completely spoilt when the waiter brought in four glasses of water with his fingers in it!! It is amazing how things like this come to her notice more than to any of us.

Another time, we were invited to a friend’s house. As we rang the bell and waited, I noticed my mother straightening their door mat. Not ours let me tell you, THEIR doormat. I asked her what she was doing, and prompt came the reply “community service.” She did not stop there. We were asked to wait in their living room where they happened to have quite a few books. As I sat there, casually reading through some of them, I saw my mother carefully arranging THEIR book shelf! I had to practically stop her from getting carried away as she started arranging them in alphabetical order!

As I stop to think about my mother’s mannerisms I realize that if one needs to have a happy childhood, one should keep their mother happy and my mother is definitely happy in a clean environment!