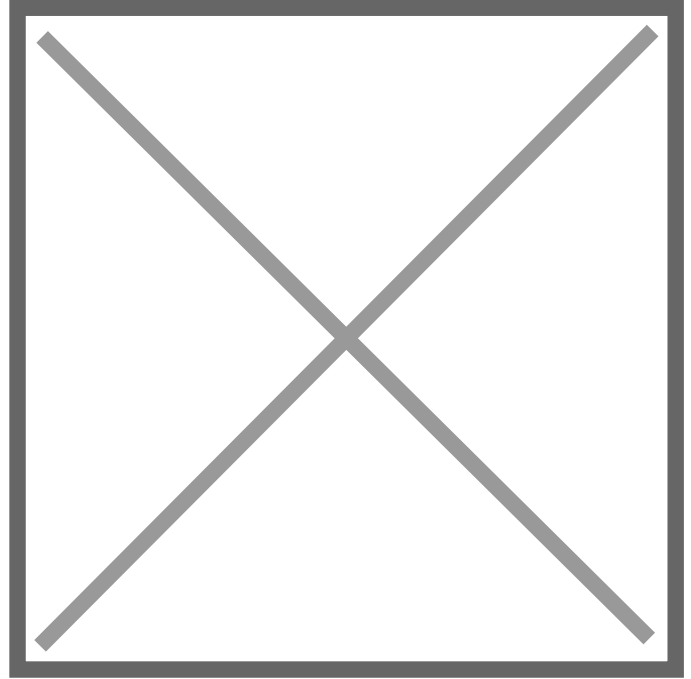


FOCUS – The myth of the ‘orange juice people’

On Captain Andy's birthday, the ducks were in a row. My bills were paid, my house was clean, my kids were smiling, my office desk was clear. It lasted about fifteen minutes. Then I accidentally kicked a large glass of *chocolate* milk down the stairs. The milk flew from the glass in a straight line over the stairs, and when the glass hit the bottom of the staircase, the rest of the milk flung itself across our white carpet in a pattern that would have made Jackson Pollock proud. And once the “clean house duck” exited himself from my row, the other ducks followed.

Allow me a personal confession: all my life I've been obsessed with having things “just as they should be.” In part, I must blame the Brady Bunch for the notion that it is possible for life to be smooth and orderly. Sure, the Bradys were a blended family. But the amazing Bradys completed the bonding process inside of two episodes! True, Marcia agonized over getting braces, but in the end, the boy she liked got braces too. Cindy's beloved doll, Kitty Karryall (is that how you spell it?), was never stolen by Bobby, as suspected, but was found in Tiger's doghouse. And despite these minor traumas, the house was always clean, everyone was healthy, and there was never a financial crisis. All of the Bradys' ducks always seemed to be in a row.



My keen, juvenile eye observed that the Bradys always had orange juice at breakfast. We almost never had orange juice in our house, since some of my family members did not like it. In my young mind, I drew a correlation between the consumption of orange juice and the living of a perfect life. So, all of the folks I knew who lived seemingly perfect lives were secretly dubbed “orange juice people.” (It was only a metaphor; I didn't *really* believe that a glass of orange juice each day insured that life would go well!)

Mercifully, I've learned that peace of mind is not found through orderliness, or even through a lack of drama in one's life. Peace of mind comes from knowing the love of God and experiencing the security that is elemental to a relationship with him. Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” (John 14:27) The best the world can offer is a Brady Bunch brand of peace. Such a “peace” is artificial, and short lived (eventually the show was canceled!). It is infinitely more comforting to know that one's soul is right with God than to have one's sock drawer in order. (I must be careful, lest my husband pin this column to the refrigerator for reference on house-cleaning day.)

The truth of the matter is, orange juice people do not exist anyway. Everyone has problems, whether they be trivial daily problems that attempt to gnaw away at one's sense of contentment, or whether they be life-defining issues that summon the substance of one's very character.

My brother and his wife seemed to be orange juice people. When they married, they had a nice home and two budding, impressive careers. Soon, they had an even nicer home, and two lovely daughters. They traveled extensively. They were well-educated and well-spoken.

But as their younger daughter grew into the toddler age, everyone began to notice that something was wrong. Sarah wasn't developing normally. My sister-in-law surrendered her career to pursue daily treatment for Sarah. And for the past five years our family has been on a roller coaster ride as Sarah has seen specialists across the country and even across the Atlantic. Varied symptoms have mounted throughout her young life. Diagnoses have been tried on for size, and ruled out. Every innovative procedure has been explored.

But Sarah is a fountain of joy. My bubbly little niece loves life. She fights to be well, to progress. She takes ballet with her big sister, though her body lacks the power of movement that her age-mates possess. She works hard in school. With her remarkable attitude, she has taught my family much about contentment.

Life is not perfect; it's messy. It's not fair and it's not easy. But at all times, we have a Savior who loves us and blesses us more than we notice. When I hear my children laugh or when I see one soldier of our congregation ministering to another, I am reminded that life is about love, not orderliness. Once we open our hearts to Christ's peace amidst the chaos, we have more time for love and less time for stress.

And that beats an organized linen closet any day.