

adult, an independent, on-your-own citizen? All would raise their hands with some enthusiasm. And then I would give them this list of things that grown-ups do:

- clean the sink strainer
- plunge out the toilet
- clean up babies when they poop and pee
- wipe runny noses
- clean up the floor when the baby throws strained spinach
- clean ovens and grease traps and roasting pans
- empty the kitty box and scrape up the dog doo
- carry out the garbage
- pump out the bilges
- bury dead pets when they get run over in the street

I'd tell the graduates that when they can do these things, they will be adults. Some of the students might not want to go on at this point. But they may as well face the truth.

It can get even worse than the list suggests. My wife is a doctor, and I won't tell you what she tells me she has to do sometimes. I wish I didn't know. I feel ill at ease sometimes being around someone who does those things. And also proud.

A willingness to do your share of cleaning up the mess is a test. And taking out the garbage of this life is a condition of membership in community.

When you are a kid, you feel that if they really loved you, they wouldn't ever ask you to take out the garbage. When you join the ranks of the grown-ups, you take out the garbage because you love them. And by "them" I mean not only your own family, but the family of humankind.

The old cliché holds firm and true.

Being an adult is dirty work.

But someone has to do it.

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