**GATE November Book Review**

 **“The Girl who Never Made Mistakes”**

 by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein.

Mark Pett, author and illustrator, shares with us the inspiration behind the story and the “art of making mistakes”.

*My three-year-old daughter creates art constantly. She draws and paints without hesitation, dances with abandon, and sings without fear of who listens. She is like most three-year-olds in this way. If she continues like most kids, however, she will soon discover her inhibitions and freeze up.*
*As a professional cartoonist (and former teacher), I’m often asked to visit classrooms to teach kids about cartooning. Invariably, there are numerous children who either won’t participate because they “can’t draw” or get frustrated that they can’t draw perfectly the first time.*
*This led to a thought experiment. What if there were a child who never made mistakes? What would her life be like? Enter Beatrice Bottomwell, celebrated in her town for having never made a mistake in as long as anyone can remember. In so many ways, her life is wonderful. She wins spelling bees. She gets perfect grades. She never spills anything, mismatches clothing, or colors outside the lines. What could be terrible about that?*
*The trouble, Beatrice increasingly discovers, is that she’s trapped in a box. Beatrice can’t try anything she doesn’t already know she’s good at. When her friends ask her to join them ice skating, she won’t because she might fail. She’s so attached to being The Girl Who Never Makes Mistakes that her range of activities becomes narrower and narrower.*
*This is the problem with the kind of perfectionism that virtually all of us experience. How many adults do you know who refuse to dance or sing or draw because that’s just not something they’re good at? Our children watch us and begin to do the very same thing.*
*In “The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes,” Beatrice’s world unravels until she fails spectacularly and publicly. The challenge for her becomes what to do in the wake of this disaster. Will she try to cover up her mistake and be perfect again? Or will she learn to let go of her fears and try new things?*

*Now, when I teach cartooning to kids, I teach the Art of Making Mistakes. Before anything else, we mark up our page with random scribbles and lines, to remind us that our sketches don’t matter. It’s wonderful to see how quickly the kids let go of their preconceptions and rediscover their ability to draw.*

A post on a parenting blog commented on the book as well:

The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes reacts to that fear of failure by asking the question, "What would it be like to never make a misstep?"  The main character, a girl named Beatrice, feels happy, loved, and validated because she never ever makes mistakes.  The book is about her first mistake and how she learns to laugh it off and move on.  Making mistakes does change her life but change is not always a bad thing.

In the case of perfectionist kids, change can be crucial.  The author, Mark Pett talked about the long-term consequences kids experience when they’re terrified to make mistakes.  He said that the fear becomes paralyzing and you end up with adults who never want to try new activities because they’re afraid of failing or looking ridiculous.  There’s a huge amount of anxiety that goes with this and a tendency to procrastinate.

His advice to parents---we need to make ourselves vulnerable so our kids can see us trying and failing so they can learn how to fail.  It really is an important skill.  We need to model good behavior because our children watch us so carefully and they mimic what we model.

**One thing he said that I loved was, “We should not make our identity our successes. We** **need to take our identity out of it and not make what we do who we are.”**

What Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein have written in this book jives so well with what worked for me in helping my daughter to embrace her imperfections and find a way to be happy with who she is.  It’s fun and instructive without feeling overly didactic and the illustrations are darling.  Look for it in a book store or library near you.

Our kids learn by example, so the only way our kids will NOT be perfectionistic, is if we teach them not to be. This means that in order to teach our kids, we’ll need to change our own perfectionistic qualities!!! This is a big task, so here are some ideas to get started!!



**Tips to Break the Cycle of Perfectionism**

[**Take a personal inventory**](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/effective_biblical_discipline/why_kids_misbehave/parenting_perfectionist_kids.aspx)

If you are a firstborn, you’ll need to do the best you can to “round off your own perfectionistic edges” if you want to help your kids become more flexible. Not surprisingly, a perfectionist child and a perfectionist parent will butt heads because when each doesn’t have their own agenda met, there will be fireworks. If you suspect that you struggle with perfectionism, ask yourself if less than perfect is OK in some instances. Is it OK for you not to feel in control if your child doesn’t pick up every toy before she goes to bed at night? Is it all right if she misses her back teeth when she is brushing now and then? When you can embrace your own imperfection, your child will realize that less than perfect is acceptable. This will help her develop into a secure, confident and flexible adult.

[**Signposts that You’re a Perfectionist Parent**](http://books.google.com/books?id=rGHwdk6auugC&pg=PT175&lpg=PT175&dq=adult+perfectionists&source=bl&ots=QMxzbSMkdQ&sig=66ifZj5XgC1dckqxh-jn6BiQkMc&hl=en&ei=VVa6TvrJM8rOgAf2j7nXCA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CGsQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=adult%20perfectionists&f=false) (excerpts from [*Be Happy Without Being Perfect: How to Break Free from the Perfection Deception*](http://www.amazon.com/Be-Happy-Without-Being-Perfect/dp/0307354881/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1320836081&sr=8-1) By Alice D. Domar, Alice Lesch Kelly)

* You criticize a lot
* You withhold approval
* You always put your child first
* You expect perfection of yourself
* You expect motherhood to make you exquisitely happy
* You feel that if your child is unhappy, you’re a bad parent
* You blame yourself for your child’s problems

[**Parents Can Help Perfectionist Children**](http://leladavidson.hubpages.com/hub/Battling_Perfectionism_in_Children)

You need to accept that you may never fully eradicate your child’s perfectionism, but you can help him to deal with it. Let children know that while it’s wonderful to begin with a grand vision, it’s also okay if the end result is different than the original plan. Stress the importance of enjoying the process of whatever activity you’re doing. Explain that finished products will improve over time as the child gets more and more practice.

Perfectionists want to give 110% at everything they do and often take on several projects at once. However, when they face multiple tasks, they often get stuck and won’t begin on anything. They need your help to sort out what needs to be done, one task at a time. They need to learn to focus all of their attention on one thing at a time. That way they get to feel satisfaction with each accomplished piece of the puzzle.

[**6 Strategies for Soothing a Perfectionist**](http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/6-strategies-for-soothing-a-perfectionist)

* Let her know it’s okay to make mistakes.
* Set an example
* Praise effort, not grades
* Round out his world:  Kids today don’t have enough time just to play, found a study published by the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. Seventy-five percent of a child’s day, researchers say, is tightly programmed with carefully outlined activities that are parent-structured and parent-supervised. Counter the perfectionist child’s belief that every minute must be spent doing something productive by giving him time to do absolutely nothing.
* Empathize with her feelings
* Hold the criticism:  Phrase any corrections generally: “Why don’t you look this sentence over?” Look over homework if your child asks you to — perhaps even asking questions such as, “How did you find the answer to that?” — but leave specific guidance to the teacher.

[**Helping Gifted Kids Manage Perfectionism**](http://nmgifted.org/SI2008/Perfectionism%20Discussion.pdf)

* Teach the student from an early age that learning is a struggle, and what one already knows represents memory, not learning.
* Challenge them to be courageous and take a risk by trying a difficult subject, task, or project.
* Listen to what the student has to say.
* Above all, their child needs to experience unconditional love and respect. Help their child appreciate his/her perfection.
* Emphasize that high standards are important and support child in maintaining these, but stress the difference between excellence and perfectionism. Also, teach their child the importance of not imposing these standards on other individuals.
* Lastly, yet very important, to help their child hold onto his/her dreams and ideals, and to believe in the child’s ability to reach them.

