



# HE SLIMED ME

My son's obsession with his gooey creations has been my undoing

BY Olivia Stren

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**"I HAVE AN IDEA!"** my son, Leo, said to me about a year ago, with a wild look in his eyes. "Let's make rainbow slime!" It was not yet 8 a.m., and I was hard-pressed to think of anything I wanted to do less.

"Maybe later," I offered my then-four-year-old, avoiding the more flammable answer that sprang to mind (i.e., "No").

"But I *neeee*ed to make something!" he pleaded, as if he were Monet, had just beheld a water lily for the first time, and here I was denying him oils and a canvas.

At the time, Leo was six months into his obsession with slime: we'd made fluffy slime, galaxy slime, clear-glue slime and retro *Ghostbusters* slime-kit slime. For the (blissfully) uninitiated, slime is a squishy, goo-like substance made from the viscous marriage of polyvinyl acetate glue, food coloring and some kind of "activator"—saline solution, laundry detergent, liquid starch—whose chemical makeup transforms all the other ingredients into a slippery, malleable glob. If those ingredients are non-negotiable, others (glitter, googly eyes, gummy bears) can be tossed in for a certain textural or aesthetic *je ne sais quoi*.

Slime was first devised by Mattel in 1976 and sold in toy stores, but the real slimers make it at home. Slime-making, I've read, can prove as relaxing for young children—a break from the pressures of, say, kindergarten—as it is for their parents. The substance's popping, squishing and clicking noises, a sound the slime community (yes, there is one) has dubbed the "thwock," are allegedly soothing to the nervous system.

Now, in 2020, slime has expanded into an economy, an art form and a culture, with its influencers, trailblazers—and tragedies. (An 11-year-old

girl from Massachusetts sustained second- and third-degree burns on her hands in a DIY slime injury involving a dangerously toxic activator called sodium tetraborate.)

In Canada, Alyssa Jagan, an 18-year-old slimer from Toronto, just published her second slime book and claims 745,000 followers on Instagram, where she posts "new satisfying slime videos" every day.

## PARENTHOOD IS A CONTINUUM OF PHASES, AND THIS SLIME ONE WAS A SINGULAR HELL.

**ALL OF THIS TO SAY** that if slime clung itself to my son's imagination, he was on trend. But if it's relaxing for many, it's deeply anxiety inducing for me—I have found it encrusted on our couch and adhered into the fibres of our clothes (and our lives). At the height of what I can only call Leo's addiction, I noticed my husband had glitter (a souvenir from the weekend's galaxy-slime enterprise) in his nostril. When I pointed this out, he replied that I had a fleck of it on my left eyebrow.

"It's so beautiful!" my mom said in an enabling way during one visit, as she spread out a glob of kaleidoscopic slime. "It looks like Notre Dame's stained-glass

rose windows!" I'm all for appreciating beauty wherever it may hide, but—and forgive the slime pun here—that seemed a bit of a stretch.

Parenthood is nothing if not a continuum of phases, and this one was a singular hell. Partly because I didn't want to deny my kid something that provides him such deep satisfaction, I leaned into it, waiting for the day that a mention of Elmer's glue wouldn't kindle in him such a gleam of excitement. It's messy, but it's creative, I'd try to convince myself as I climbed a ladder to scrape a remnant of sand slime stuck to the kitchen ceiling.

**THE SUMMER OFFERED RELIEF:** we spent more time in the sunshine and less of the day mixing blue food colouring with glitter glue and liquid corn starch. But just when I thought (hoped, prayed, etc.) that Leo's interest might be waning, COVID-19 arrived, demanding that we all stay home. While necessity is the mother of invention, in my case, it was also the less proud mother of derangement.

We can never predict how we'll respond to a plague; it caused me, in

a moment of diabolical instability, to say to my bored son, "I know, do you want to make slime?" He looked at me searchingly, as if even he couldn't believe the extravagance of my misstep. "Okay!" he chirped, clasping his little hands in anticipatory madness.

There we were, again, in production. Leo gleefully began to toss cloudlets of fluffy slime (made with shaving cream) onto the walls, and he wondered, "Do you think it sticks, Mummy?" (PSA: it does.) As the concoction cleaved to my walls, in my mind was a combination of regret, despair and this question: how can I, in this moment, self-distance from myself?

People reveal themselves in a crisis, goes the truism, and I have revealed myself to be an idiot, with a talent for self-sabotage. However, I've also revealed myself to be a person who can expertly claim a position on whether or not to use Tide as an activator. (I prefer Persil.) And so this season of pestilence has bloomed into a season of slime—with moments of despair and longing, along with glittery flecks of hope, all mixed together, slime-like, as it were. **R**



## Fast Lane

Driving a race car is like dancing with a chainsaw.

CALE YARBOROUGH

What's behind you doesn't matter.

ENZO FERRARI