

Leaving a *trace*

Tracy Spiers reassures parents of small ones this summer you are not the only one who has a house, car, bag and outfit that expressively displays the traces of the little people you love



Mrs Bennet's Diary -
Illustration by Rosie Spiers

After unwittingly calling the police at one year old, Miss Bennet Number Five was now banned from using a phone until her 18th birthday. Having acquired proficient dialling skills, she was therefore not impressed with either parent. Just as Jane Austen's girls in *Pride & Prejudice* were well-accomplished in reading, music and poetry, this Miss Bennet knew she too must find another aptitude to add to her collection. So she became an artist. She picked up a colouring pencil and started producing works of art. But being an enthusiast, she quickly got fed up with paper and progressed onto canvas, plastic, wood, wall, door, tile, carpet and even her parents' duvet cover. The latter still boasted the permanent marker design five years later.

Mrs Bennet knew nothing about her youngest daughter's talent until she started working at the computer. As with any other artist, Miss Bennet Number Five had left her signature. The entire computer keyboard was plastered in a multi-coloured array of lines, criss-crossed in every direction. The artist hadn't left a blank mark on her chosen canvas.

Although slightly annoyed by the discovery, Mrs Bennet was rather

impressed when she discovered it was her 16-month-old daughter rather than her four-year-old who had been responsible.

Later that evening, she realised that this artistic streak was contagious. Twin number one, Miss Bennet Number Five had obviously received the same flair by twin to twin transfusion, for she had almost tie-dyed her white long-sleeved top. She was sporting the new Bennet design - sporadic purple splodges and a matching purple tongue. The finishing

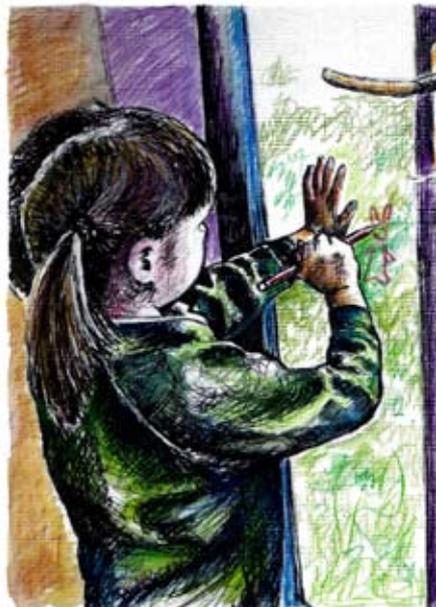


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touch was a purple dot on her nose and identical marks on her fingers. Her twin sister however was displeased. Also a victim of the purple felt-tip pen, she was quivering and holding out her stained hand in protest. She did NOT want to be part of the gallery.

The gallery had many exhibits. The conservatory windows revealed a mixture of hand and mouth prints; the carpet displayed an interesting mix of milk marks, paint, wine and other stains which shall remain nameless; the kitchen floor showed off scribbles, crushed raisins and stale toast crumbs and the upstairs rooms had the same contemporary feel as downstairs.

Everywhere Mrs Bennet looked there were traces of her children - evidence of where they'd been and what they'd been doing. Yet there was a sense of freedom and warm assurance in their markings. It was the home gallery and she was proud of it. Every mark left a trace of her daughters' personality, their joyful expression and creativity. And although at times she needed to remove the evidence, there were other times when it was comforting to leave the marks where they were. One day when they had left home, she would have a spotless house and how she would miss their childhood masterpieces. ■