

DOCTOR AS PARENT

Vacationing with kids helps family reconnect

Enjoy fun times with your children before they leave the nest

by Mel Borins

BEING A PARENT in this busy, demanding world is difficult. We have to deal with working, shopping, cleaning, paying bills, going to the bank, spending time with friends, and answering the phone and e-mail. They all interrupt the uninterrupted time we need to spend with our children. There is no better way for any family to grow closer than to spend time together away on vacation.

Many couples don't enjoy travelling with children because they feel children interfere with their time away and so, ironically, "it's no vacation." Also many parents feel it may be unfair to uproot the kids.

When friends heard my wife, Bonnie, and I were travelling to Asia for four months with our three boys, they responded almost as if with one voice: "Isn't it dangerous? If my child ever got sick I would feel so guilty. Children need the security of their own home and friends. My kids wouldn't eat the food. How can you deprive their grandparents from seeing them for such a long time? It's hard enough travelling without having the hassles of children to spoil the fun. How unromantic!"

All these objections have an element of truth to them. Travelling with children is more complicated. There is an element of risk. Having kids sleeping in the same room does interfere with romance.

However, the benefits of travelling with kids far outweigh the disadvantages. Have you ever felt that your children are growing too fast? Are you so busy there's little time left to spend together as a family? Are you worried that your children's friends have a greater influence on them than you do?

I see many families where the father is so busy the children rarely see him. In other families the rush is on to get out of the house each morning. Then everyone scatters in different directions for the rest

of the day until they bump into each other again at dinner.

Travelling together can put you back in touch with your family in a way that's not possible at home. You and your partner will have more time to sit and chat about what's happening in your lives and in the children's lives. You can begin to work together more co-operatively and consistently.

Dr. Stuart Hill is an entomologist and professor of ecology in Sydney, Australia. His only memories of spending time with his father were during summer vacation. Most of the time his dad was working and had little time to spend with the children. Dr. Hill says if it hadn't been for those two weeks each summer, he would never have known what his father was really like. It was an invaluable time for son and father.

A young mother, Betty Antreskis, asked me to recommend a book to help her discipline her child. The book, *Children: The Challenge*, by psychiatrist Dr. Rudolph Dreikurs, discusses approaches to child rearing and specifically deals with behaviour problems. She and her husband took it away with them while on holiday with their son and read it together each day.

Since they were away and there were no other diversions or time pressures, they were able to devote much more attention to helping their three-year-old son Alex. They talked about the changes they could make, especially in terms of how they reacted to his temper tantrums. They agreed to set limits and began to be more consistent. Their relationship with each other also improved because of what they shared.

Another family I knew was having a particularly rough time together. The parents were constantly arguing; they even slept in separate bedrooms. Their two children were misbehaving at school and difficult to manage at home. Principals, teachers, psychiatrists, social workers



Dr. Mel Borins practises what he preaches, enjoying time in Maui with his wife, Bonnie, and three sons. The family also spent time together on a trip to Lake Louise, Alta., last summer.

and I, as their family doctor, were all involved.

The family finally took a three-week summer vacation to France and Spain and a change began to take place. They were together 24 hours a day. Since the parents were not at work they were able to pay constant attention to their two boys. The children finally got the supervision and extended contact for which they had been longing.

When the family returned home the parents were more open with each other. They even began to share the same bed again. The children were more relaxed and less anxious and upset. Teachers, social workers and psychiatrists were

amazed at the transformation. The vacation was a catalyst for a positive change.

There is a certain intensity that occurs when you are on holiday together that is so difficult to attain when you are at home. This is why I recommend vacations as a therapeutic way to build healthier marriages, families and friendships.

The time away doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. The important component is the chance to be together and have fun.

Mel Borins is a family physician in Toronto. He is author of the books "Go Away Just for the Health of It" and "An Apple a Day: A Holistic Health Primer."

Practice notes

Lost in translation When practising medicine in Dixieland, you have to have the right words or at least know the meaning in Alabamese, the language of the rural folks. Their speech is colourful and descriptive but their geographical knowledge is poor. When they learned that I was a Canadian doctor from British Columbia, some of the locals asked me, "Is that place across the water?" or, "Ain't that some place in South America?" The most common question was, "Don't you Columbians grow a lot of pot and coke?"

"Just pot I said, it's called B.C. bud and no coke, just Coca-Cola."

"Oh, you mean Co'-Colaa, Doc."

At first I used to seek the help of my

nurse, Wanda, a colourful and outspoken African-America who got a lot of joy from the crazy questions asked and colourful expressions used. But sometimes even she was stumped in our medical clinic in Marion, Ala. On Thursdays from noon to 2:30 we used to go to the VD clinic to look after the poor people. Many of the problems were common but large mommas and a bro or two had a unique way of putting things in a different light at the medical clinic and the VD clinic.

"Hi, doc, shore glad to see you. Ah needs help bad, doc. My nature done deserted me and that's for sure. Doc, I needs a shot before my new wife takes off."

"What kind of a nature shot is that, Joe?"

"Doc, I just had my 70th birthday and haven't been able to get it up for two weeks come this Saturday night."

At this time Wanda interjected, "He's just married a young woman. His wife died about a year ago. Doctor, he wants a shot of testosterone for his

impotence. He usually gets a prescription and brings it back here and I give him a couple of ccs in his backside. He won't take no for an answer."

Against my better judgment I wrote out the prescription for testosterone and gave it to him.

"Thanks, doc, and if she done gets pregnant then I'll name the boy after you for sure. Shore do 'preciate it."

The next case was a 40-year-old, Mrs. Jones, a diabetic woman who complained, "Doc, ah's gotta an itchy monkey. This is driving me and Earl crazy—do something, doc. My new man, Earl, he got somethin' too. Ah don't know if I give it to him or he done give it to me. Doc, maybe we's playing catch with it, huh?"

Wanda's definition of a "monkey" was either the vagina or the labia or both.

"Mrs. Jones, please go into the examining room and we'll take a look with a speculum. There's a sheet in there to cover yourself. If Earl has a penile discharge he'd better come in to

the VD clinic."

"Doc, you ain' goin to use that cold speculum, are you? Please, doc, warm it up. . . . And Earl, he don't like doctors, and they's always fixin' to give him a shot of penicillin. He drips a lot from his faucet—leaky-like. When you feelin' around for my for fire-ball, please don't mash my belly too hard."

Wanda informed me that "fire-ball" meant fibroids and "to mash" means to "palpate the abdomen firmly."

"Yes, Mrs. Jones, we'll warm the speculum. And I won't mash you hard. Please insist that Earl come in tomorrow."

After taking a series of slides and wet preps, we found Mrs. Jones had thrush, chlamydia and gonorrhea in her vagina. After a series of treatments we got a cure and finally got her diabetes under control.

About three months later, Mrs. Jones again appeared with the old refrain, "Say, doc, ah's got an itchy monkey again but Earl's weiner's OK for now."

Cawthorn was a great African-American always full of fun. He had a wealth of expressions that were very funny. Cawthorn suffered from big toe problems, same as his dad. Early one morning he hobbled into the medical clinic with a swollen, red, painful right big toe.

"Lawdy, doc, I never slept a wink last night. Ah's had toe trouble off and on for months. Usually takes a lot of Aspirin but that don't help none last night. Please fix me up, doc, won't you?"

"Cawthorn, you have arthritis in your big toe. I'll do a blood test and then I'm going to freeze your toe and suck out some fluid from your toe joint, probably full of uric acid crystals. I'll give you some new pills that will cure the problem."

"Crystals in my big toe, doc? They don't shatter none do they? And here ah always figured ah had the gouch."

No interpretation of this disease. "Gouch" says it all.—*Sterling Haynes is a retired physician in Westbank, B.C.*