

**Have yourself
a Local
Little holiday...**


www.citymarket.coop

We carry over 1,000 Vermont products





Your Community-Owned Grocery Store
Open 7 a.m. - 11 p.m. every day • 802-863-3659
82 South Winooski Avenue, Burlington
We welcome EBT, CAT\$cratch, Knight & CCCash Cards and manufacturers' coupons.



Psychoanalysis
Individuals & Couples

Pastoral Counseling
Jungian orientation

9 Center Court
Northampton MA

River Road,
Putney VT
802-387-5547

Janet Langdon, Mdiv, NCPsyA

jliesl@sover.net

**JOHN'S FURNITURE
REFINISHING SHOP**

Quality Repairs, Stripping and Finishing
11B Howe Center, Rutland, VT
802-786-2250

A Fountain of Youth for your old Furniture
Over 18 years of passion and experience

Susan McKenzie MS.
Jungian Psychoanalyst
Licensed Psychologist — Master

Specializing in issues of Gay, Lesbian,
Bi-sexual and Transgendered individuals and couples

Quechee — White River Junction (802) 295-5533
Insurance Accepted

out in the mountains
mountainpridemediaweb.org

INAFAMILYWAY BY ARLENE ISTAR LEV

Practically Perfect
in Every Way

MOST PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHILDREN have some vague plans to parent better than their parents had. I had visions of a fun home, filled with laughter and toys. I knew I would never worry much about things like children with chocolate on their faces, or rooms with toys strewn about. But it turned out to be a bit different than I had envisioned. It seems that children with chocolate on their faces often have it on their hands too, and therefore it is also on the walls, counters, toilet paper, schoolbooks, check book ... And the toys strewn about on the floor are often broken, sometimes with sharp edges, and the chocolate wrapper that was left on the floor when the chocolate on their faces was first consumed becomes a homing device for all the ants in the neighborhood.

I didn't know that homes filled with laughter, often meant that parents were the butt of the jokes, literally. My younger son has referred to me as "Ms Butt-Fanny," and then collapsed on the floor amid peals of laughter; any attempts on my part at that moment at serious discipline will just reinforce the pejorative title ... at least he called me "Ms."

I remember thinking: I would love to spend hours playing with finger paints with my children. All you need is newspaper to cover the floor, some old clothes, and how messy could it be? But when my son stuck his head into the blue paint and shook it, like a wet dog, it made me rethink the fun of painting indoors. I put the paint away on a high shelf and was therefore surprised four years later when his younger brother climbed onto the shelf and opened each plastic paint bottle and attempted to neatly pour the paint into small circles just like they do in school. I luckily came into the room when the third bottle was running down the length of the living room. Do you know the clean up song? "Clean up, clean up, everybody everywhere, clean up..." It's supposed to engage the child in helping, but really it's just a kind of a verbal time out, a mantra to calm down parents.

I once heard a dad tell a story about how he used to go to visit friends with children and he'd see them jumping on the furniture, kicking their parents, throwing food on the floor and he'd think, "Why do they allow that?" Then he had children and said now he understood that they didn't "allow" it, they just hadn't figure out how to stop it.

My therapist voice wants to say "yet," but it is a more hopeful voice than my experienced parent voice. Like dogs that hump, and cats that refuse to come when called, children do not simply do as they are told. Some actually do the opposite of what they are told, and some don't even care much if they get caught. When my younger son was discovered eating a few pounds of Belgium chocolate (actually procured in Belgium) wrappers included, he didn't even stop eating it while I ran up the stairs, yelling, smoke coming out of my ears. He just sat there and chewed. When I screamed, "What were you thinking?" he explained, "Well," he said slowly, "I knew you would never let me eat it, so I thought what is the worst thing you were gonna do to me if I did?" What a great question! What was the worst thing I could do, legally, that is?

I know the feeling of

watching parents yell at children, yank children by the arm, threaten them inane, "I will leave you in the store forever," and thinking how ineffective, inappropriate, and sometimes bordering on abusive these parenting strategies are, yet I'd be a liar if I didn't say I've watched myself doing them. I say "watched myself," because it is a bit of an out of body experience, usually when I'm overtired (did I ever mention that parenting is exhausting?), or God forbid, ill. Illness is simply not allowed when you are a parent. If you are running a fever, have a headache, or are throwing up, children

kind of cock their heads and quietly look at you strangely, turn their music up higher, jump on the bed, leap onto your body and say, "Sorry, you don't feel well ... So, when's dinner?"

I used to have many opinions about all the things my mother did wrong while parenting me. Now I suspect she actually deserves an award for all the things she could have done much worse, for all the ways she modeled restraint. Unlike Mary Poppins, I am not Practically Perfect in most ways, and I have discovered more ways to be imperfect than I ever even imagine existed. ▽



Arlene Istar Lev is a family therapist in Albany, New York and is the author of *The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Book* and *Transgender Emergence*. She and her partner Sundance are the parents of Shaiyah, age 11, and Eliezer, age 6. You can reach her through www.choicesconsulting.com