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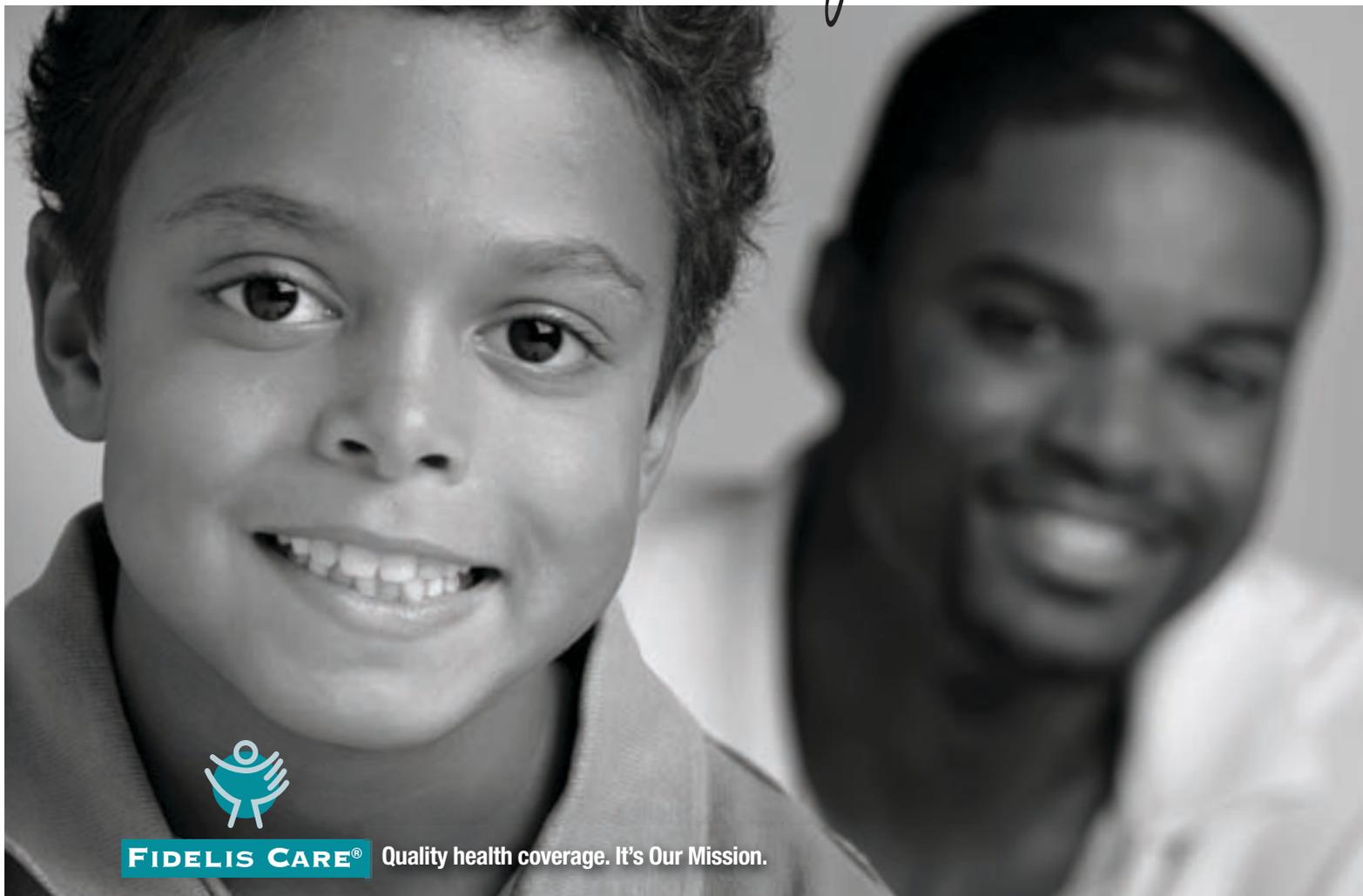
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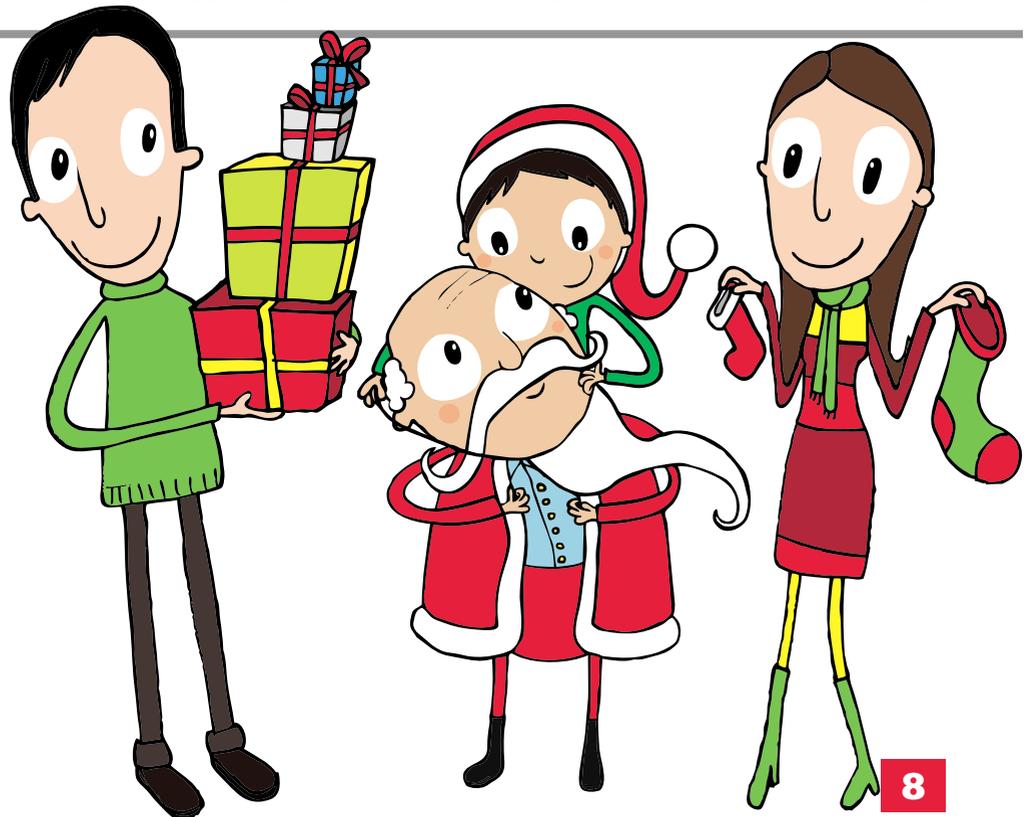
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Letter from the publisher

Happy Holidays!

Time is a crazy thing. It seems like a few short years ago that I was a new mom with the tiniest human being I'd ever seen or held laying on my belly. I can recall it as clearly as if it were yesterday; how exhausted I was and yet how elated



and aware I was of the responsibility of being someone's parent.

Parenting is the most exciting thing I've ever done and the most rewarding. I have worked most of my life at one thing or another, and I have always enjoyed both my studies and my work, but being a Mom is the best. It also happily led me to this wonderful work.

Parenting also brought me to the great partners I have in this work ad-

venture. Sharon Noble, who has become more than a partner is definitely family. It was parenting her oldest son eight years ago that led her here to us, as she was reading *Queens Family* and called with a question. That question led to a much longer conversation, and here we are.

Cliff Luster, who as the head of our larger company and the father of little ones at the time, gave me the opportunity to put this thing in motion and so we began in 1999 to publish what would go on to become the first of the guides, *Brooklyn Family*.

We have a super staff of mostly Moms and some Dads, and I appreciate all of them. They are bright, dedicated and lots of fun to be around.

I want to thank them all and specifically mention the name of my personal assistant Tina Felicetti. She has a wonderful sense of humor and is fabulous to work with. I appreciate her more than I can say.

A few names I want to mention out loud are the sales team of Lori Falco (Brooklyn), Sharon Leverett (Brooklyn), Shanika Stewart (Riverdale) and Alexis Benson (Manhattan). They keep me on my toes and are a formidable group of sales professionals.

Vinny DiMiceli (Staten Island), Lisa, Courtney, Joanna, Jessecia and Shavana make up the editorial gang we rely on for great headlines, copyediting, social media, and more. Leah Mitch (the art director), On Man, Arthur, Earl, Charlotte, Mauro, Mariel, Raymond and Cheryl make up our design and production teams,

and Sylvan is our web guru, and I mean guru.

We have a great group of staff and contributing writers at New York Parenting and I thank them all as well. And thank you for the success you have given us. We now have guides in all five boroughs which makes perfect sense, because our team actually lives in all five boroughs!

It's been a great year and I have little doubt that 2014 will be the same. Wishing all of you a Happy Season and a good beginning to the New Year.

Thanks for reading.

Susan Weiss-Voskidis,
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Simplifying your gift giving with **APPS**

BY SUSAN FRENCH

With the holiday season in full swing, the pressure's on to find that perfect gift. Gift-giving is a skill, especially when finding presents for kids.

There are traditional gifts like toys and clothes, which can be costly, and not always what children are wishing for. Practical items like sweaters, gloves, and scarves are not fun for the youngest recipients to open. When children are the target audience, keep in mind a few essential gift-giving goals: find items that are entertaining, educational, interactive, and cost-effective.

This may sound like a tall order, but it's a cinch with apps!

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For instance, if we want to teach children organizational and time-management skills, voice-activated calendar apps are great gifts (es-

pecially for a new calendar year). They allow kids to hone organizational skills through play with colorful sticker graphics as they learn the days of the week and schedule their activities. Look for interactive features that encourage self-awareness and build self-confidence, such as recording reminder audio memos and sharing activities through social networking.

Not sure how to find the perfect app? Lucky for you, there are entire websites devoted to reviewing educational apps that can help guide you through the process in just minutes.

For a quick review, check out fun-educationalapps.com and bestapps-for-kids.org. It is the goal of these sites to provide our kids with enticing, educational apps, and they provide a place for parents and caregivers to see the app in action.

And the great thing about apps is that you can give in bulk. They make great presents for teachers to give their students, and they are a one-stop shop for grandparents' gift-giving needs. To top it all off, apps only cost a few dollars, as compared to expensive toys and planners. They also cut-down on clutter and help the environment! Plus, app-giving allows you to shop from home and avoid the holiday season's long, stressful lines.

So do yourself and your little ones a favor this holiday season — give the gift of an app!

Susan French is a kindergarten teacher, mentor, and math coach, working for the city's Department of Education for more than 20 years. She is the co-creator of the 4KidCal brand of mobile calendar apps designed specifically for children. For more information on 4KidCal, visit 4KidCal.com or write to 4kidcal@gmail.com.



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12 ways to keep the meaning in your holiday season

BY DENISE YEARIAN

In the midst of holiday hooplas, children often lose sight of the significance of the season. Taking a spin off the “Twelve Days of Christmas” song, the following is a list of a dozen ways to create a more meaningful holiday celebration.

1. Grassroots giving. One of the best ways to make your holiday more meaningful is to adopt a family from a local charity. When you call, ask for a family with children your own kids’ ages. Then, if you normally give your child five gifts, suggest giving three and let him pick out two for each needy child.

2. Aspiring ornaments. Have

each family member secretly write one non-monetary thing they want to work for, wish for, and pray for in the coming year. Then, put it in a decorative envelope or ornament and attach it to the tree. On Christmas morning share it with the other family members and discuss ways everyone can help that person fulfill his goal.

3. Go green. Reuse holiday wrapping paper to cover another gift, line a drawer, or draw on the reverse side. Christmas cards can be recycled, too. Cut them in half and use the blank side to jot down reminder notes or let your kids cut them up and make new cards for next year. Christmas trees can be

recycled as well. Take them to state parks rather than sending them to the curb for trash pick up.

4. Multicultural merriment. Every year, pick one country and find out how it celebrates the holiday season. Make mock passports that can be used year after year. Find out what the culture and traditions are like, learn a few words, and try their foods. If you have extended family members from other parts of the country, have them share insights and tell stories about their holiday celebrations.

5. Advent virtues. Make an advent calendar with character traits you want to instill in your family. Pick one virtue each day, discuss what it means, and talk about someone in history who displayed that character. Then, decide how you and your children can put that virtue into action. For example, extend kindness by raking an elderly neighbor’s leaves or shoveling snow from her driveway.

6. Family photo tree. Decorate your tree with individual photos of family members taken throughout the year. Mount images on construction paper, felt, or foam, write the date on the back, attach a ribbon, and hang it on the tree. Keep photos year after year and add more as you go to remind kids of how blessed they have been throughout their childhood. When your children are grown, pass along the pictures so they can carry on the tradition.

7. Inter-generational experiences. If grandparents have personal items they want to pass along to their grandchildren, the holidays are an opportune time. Suggest they give something that is special to them, along with the story behind it. It could be one of grandma’s old dolls, a piece of jewelry, a book, or even a photograph. If the kids are old enough, they can video record the story

More ways to a meaningful holiday

Looking for more ways to make the holiday season more meaningful?

- Befriend an elderly person at a nursing home and create a comfort care package with tissues, sox, stuffed animal, potpourri, etc.
- Visit a local children’s hospital and take balloons, gifts, or other goodwill cheer to the patients.
- Donate time and resources to a homeless shelter, soup kitchen, or food bank.
- Give staples to an animal shelter. Call and ask what they need first.
- Write a note of appreciation to someone who has helped you or your family this year.
- Give the gift of experience. Wrap up an i.o.u. or tickets to a live theater presentation, aquarium, zoo, or other venue, along with the date you plan go in the next few months.

• Make homemade gifts that cost little or nothing for family, friends, and pets.

• Create homemade ornaments using everyday household materials.

• Create a coupon book with certificates that can be redeemed at a later time — help with housework, an hour of quality time, etc.

• Discuss the meanings and symbols of the holiday season.

• Create a flag that represents what the holidays mean to you and your family.

• Interview grandparents about what Christmas was like when they were a child. Video record the session and make it a keepsake.

• Create your own family version of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” or write your own holiday poem.

• Have a pajama holiday where everyone gets a new pair and stays in their pjs all day.

• Teach a new skill to someone, such as computers for the elderly or knitting for a child.

• Spend one-on-one time with each child creating a special holiday tradition.

• Create a time capsule to represent events that have happened throughout the year. Seal and bury it for 20 or more years.

• Create an annual paper quilt that links 12 pieces (3-by-4) of construction paper with scenes depicting each month of the year. Punch holes around the sides that connect and sew it together with yarn.

• Invent a new holiday recipe.

• Donate new children’s coats to an organization such as Operation Warm (www.operationwarm.org).

• Read one holiday classic (or a chapter of one) every night leading up to Christmas.

• Have a family Christmas program where each person presents a song, poem, reading or artistic presentation. Video record and view in years to come.

Top
Tips



for keepsake.

8. Mindful of military. Have your child write a letter of appreciation to someone in the military. Include a picture of your child and an e-mail address, and ask the service person to send a reply e-mail along with pictures if he has them. There are several websites that provide officers' names and care package suggestions. If your children love animals, check out Operation Military Pride's Kindness for K9's link (www.operationmilitarypride.org), where you can send dog biscuits, chew toys, and other pet items to service dogs.

9. Warm fuzzies. Families so often forget to share positive and encouraging words with one another. Have your family sit in a circle and pass a fuzzy teddy bear around. As you do so, have the person holding the bear say something he appreciates about one sitting to his right or left. This will set the tone for an uplifting celebration and teach your kids how to give strokes of encouragement to others.

10. Critter Christmas. Decorate an outdoor tree with pinecones rolled in peanut butter and birdseed, popcorn and cranberry garland, and orange and apple slices that have been attached to pipe cleaners or opened paperclips and hung on the tree's boughs. This is a way to take care of neighboring wildlife and wish them a happy holiday.

11. Family fitness. Incorporate the "Twelve Days" theme into a family fitness routine. Decide on one activity you can do together each day to stay fit — walk around the neighborhood and look at lights, jump rope to a favorite holiday song, or play a round of basketball while the pie is baking. Then make it a family New Year's resolution.

12. Family video newsletter. Each child can take turns being the anchorperson while you record, but make it more than just reading off news. Take footage from the kids' bedrooms where they are showing a favorite stuffed animal or in the yard performing a newly acquired skill. Send copies of the DVD with your holiday cards, or attach it to a holiday greeting e-mail and donate the money you save on stamps to charity.

Denise Yearian is the former editor of two parenting magazines and the mother of three children.



DEAR
DR. KARYN
DR. KARYN GORDON

Bullying must-knows

Dear Dr. Karyn,

I saw you on “Good Morning America” this week discussing the complex topic of bullying. As a parent of four kids, ranging from ages 6 to 17, I often struggle knowing how to respond. Are we creating a “soft generation,” or should we be more firm? I really appreciated hearing some of your thoughts. Can you share your perspective on what parents needs to know about bullying?

The topic of bullying is everywhere! Bullying has long been recognized as a problem, but parents and educators are now taking the topic seriously, to the point that there are “zero tolerance” rules in schools. So what do parents need to teach their kids about bullying? Here are my five tips:

Know the key differences between “bullying” and “teasing”: While it is a good thing that more attention is being paid toward getting rid of bullying, the problem is that kids are now likely to label every mean comment or action among friends as “bullying,” which is dangerous for two reasons:

- The term “bullying” loses its impact when it is over-used or used inappropriately
- How kids should respond to bullying is very different to teasing

The key is to understand the difference. Bullying is the correct term when there is a power imbalance and the intent is malicious. It often

involves more than one child targeting another, often with a pattern of repetition, and can be physical (hitting, punching) or social (spreading rumors) in person or online. Teasing occurs between two people whose power is the same, and frequently the roles are reversed, with both teasing the other, and the intent is not to cause harm. Feelings may be hurt by teasing, but it is important for parents to understand the context before we or our kids label someone else as a bully.

Empower your teased kids to stand up for themselves: If your kids are being teased by another child, empower them to stand up for themselves. Encourage them to face the person, give eye contact, and in a strong, assertive voice, address the issue directly, such as, “Don’t say that — that’s mean.”

Tell them to quickly change the topic (which will defuse the situation) and move onto another toy or activity. For your child’s self-respect, it’s important for him to be courageous and not have an adult rescue him! Role-play this out with your child to help him feel confident about his response. You can play your child (and how you want him to respond) and he can act out the “teaser.”

Warning: kids love to role-play, so give yourself enough time for this!

Empower your kids to report bullying to an adult: Bullying is not the time to practice conflict-resolution skills. In bullying, there is a power imbalance, so it’s important to get an adult involved to help right away. This is why differentiating between bullying and teasing is so critical for kids because the solution is different. If the adult they tell is not handling it properly, or taking it seriously enough, they need to tell another adult.

Parents also need to teach their kids about the role of the bystander. More than 85 percent of children will see bullying happen at some point during their school career — the question is what did they do? Seeing it and feeling badly about it is not enough! The key is to take action and tell someone!

Teach social and emotional learning: What’s the solution to bullying? There are many solutions, but one key solution is social and emo-

tional learning! A lot of research has shown that kids who are bullies and aggressive are actually quite sensitive themselves. The problem is that they don’t know how to express their emotions so a lot of their pain and anger comes out as aggression towards others. This doesn’t excuse it, but it helps to understand it.

Many schools across the country that have implemented social and emotional learning programs that teach skills such as empathy, conflict skills, and emotion management have experienced dramatic results with students’ academics increasing, and are also seeing bullying and acts of aggression decreasing.

Be empathetic with emotions and firm with boundaries: As parents, the key is to be empathetic yet firm — validate the emotion and have consequences for inappropriate or aggressive behavior. Part of emotional learning is understanding the difference between emotions and behavior. We cannot control how we feel — anger, sadness, hurt, frustration — but we can control our behavior.

When our kids are hurting, encourage them to talk and get their feelings out. Validate the emotion (“I understand why you feel hurt”) and listen. At the same time, have a firm boundary and consequence if a child is acting out an emotion. For example, it’s okay for a child to feel angry, but it’s not okay for the child to hit his sister. If he does, there needs to be a consequence.

•••

As parents, it’s our job to teach these critical skills to our kids. Research tells us that while we can intellectually teach empathy and boundaries to our kids, the best way for our kids to learn it is to experience empathy and boundaries from us — the beautiful balance between being loving yet firm!

Dr. Karyn Gordon is one of North America’s leading relationship and parenting experts. She is a regular contributor to “Good Morning America,” founder of dk Leadership, best-selling author of “Dr. Karyn’s Guide To The Teen Years” (Harper Collins), and motivational speaker to a quarter of a million people. Visit her at www.dkleadership.org and on Twitter: @DrKarynGordon.



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JUST WRITE MOM

DANIELLE SULLIVAN

10 holiday refusals

Are you the kind of person who looks forward to the holidays all year long, but sometimes secretly wishes they were already over? I admit I have both opposing feelings swishing about inside of me every single holiday season. Most of the angst comes from doing a lot of things we don't want to do or worse, don't have any time to do. (Why is it still so hard for so many of us to simply say "no"?)

In an effort to retain my sanity, and actually enjoy the holiday as opposed to just get through it, I've compiled a list of a few things I just will not do this holiday season:

- Attend holiday parties that I don't want to attend. We all have obligations, but shouldn't our own happiness fall somewhere into our priorities? There are often too many parties and too little time. As parents, we have trouble just getting to all the holiday shows, Christmas tree lightings, and plays that our own kids star in. Adding in the many party invites and long shopping list might require pulling all nighters just to keep up, because the house, homework, kids, grocery shopping, cooking, work projects, etc. just do not go away in December — as much as we might wish they did.

- Go overboard on presents. More

does not equate with a better holiday, because material things never equal happiness — ever.

- Buy any overpriced piece of junk, because it's this year's biggest fad. When I've done this in the past, I have always regretted it.

- Do last-minute shopping. This makes the holiday annoying and stressful — the polar opposite of fun.

- Stress. In any capacity. I plan to start not stressing ASAP. "Whatever happens, happens, and I will find a way to go with the flow." That will be my mantra.

- Buy anything just because it's on sale. Deals can, unfortunately, be synonymous with junk. I will do my

homework way before I buy anything and know exactly what I want to buy and why.

- Rush. I want to take in each moment, because that is the only way to enjoy anything. (If I can accomplish this, then that will be a gift to myself this holiday season.)

- Spend more time in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning, or decorating, than time with my family.

- Miss watching "Charlie Brown's Christmas," "Frosty The Snowman," or "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." Homework be damned (or at least finished earlier). When those movies are on, we're watching them together as a family.

- NOT enjoy the season. Life's too short and the holidays are too precious to not savor. Kids grow up, family members pass on. The time to enjoy each other is right now!

Wishing you and yours a very healthy, happy, and memorable holiday season!

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, has worked as a writer and editor in the parenting world for more than 10 years. Sullivan also writes about pets and parenting for Disney's Babble.com. Find Danielle on her blog, Some Puppy To Love.



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Families who survived Hurricane Sandy

A year after
the storm,
three families
share their
firsthand
accounts

BY TAMMY SCILEPPI

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” took on a whole new meaning on Oct. 29 last year — her wrath and “Don’t mess with me” fury sparking fear in the hearts of otherwise brave New Yorkers.

Many were bystanders and watched with utter disbelief images of homeless victims struggling to carry on, despite their horrible circumstances — thousands of them in our very own backyards. Parents across the city wondered how to protect and provide for their families and children — some of them without access to food, heat, transportation, or power.

Each survivor has his personal story to tell.

As they still struggle getting their lives back on track, three families from New York City share their firsthand accounts with NY Parenting readers.

Moore family

Many New Yorkers seem to forget that Manhattan is surrounded by water.

When the storm hit, the normally placid Hudson turned strangely dark and menacing, with high ocean-like waves. Nobody could have imagined that the river would breach its banks and overflow into Battery Park and beyond — flooding streets, buildings, and the tunnel — like something out of a doomsday scenario.

Battery Park City resident Ron Moore and his family lived in one of those posh riverfront buildings. The vibrant community and scenic views drew them to this area a couple of years ago, until a raging river and flood waters forced them to evacuate after the storm.

“When the water came into our lobby, I knew it was time to pack up the SUV and get the heck out of Dodge,” recalled the father of three. “Suddenly, nothing mattered — only that my fam-

ily was safe and warm, and out of harm’s way.”

Luckily, they had a place to go — their home in Connecticut. But once there, they were shocked to discover they’d have to make do with a similar situation. After a month or so they returned to their city dwelling, but never felt safe there again. Now they’re back in Connecticut for good.

Brookins family

Rockaway Beach is home to the city’s only legal surfing. Sandy ravaged the area, destroying its boardwalk and covering its streets with sand.

Film director and surfer Thomas Brookins, 41, was fighting another battle — the scariest one of his life — as the storm hit his community.

“We had just purchased our home in July, at the same time I was in an ongoing battle with cancer, so moving in was very hard. We had a 1-year-old son,” he recalled.

In his condition everything was a chore, and between his film work, raising the child, and working on the new house, life was tedious and exhausting for him and his wife Jess.

When he and his wife bought the house, Thomas said they were assured their block would never flood — neighbors told them they never had any problems. So, the couple turned down flood insurance, opting instead to invest their money in renovations.

Little did they know that the ocean they loved so much would suddenly turn on them, fueled by an angry superstorm — and that they’d lose everything.

“I saw water rushing in from the Bay and we decided, for [my son] Takoda’s safety, to leave and go live in Brooklyn,” Thomas recalled. So, they stayed in a tiny apartment with a friend, his wife, two babies, and two dogs.

Thomas said a guest had been staying with them in their Rockaway Beach house, and decided to remain in the home, since he had work in the morning.

“A few hours later, we got texts from him saying the street was rushing like

rapids over the tops of cars. He heard a noise downstairs in the extra bedroom and my office and editing bay. He observed what he called, ocean waves spewing out of the floor and hitting the ceiling. From there the basement flooded in three minutes to the top of the stairs. As it reached the front door, he texted, ‘I just saw what looked like someone’s house float down the street; your basement so far is a total loss.’”

Thomas and his wife were horrified. He recalled rushing home the next morning to find something from a movie scene.

“I walked through debris and filth to the house, ran inside and stood at the top of the cold dark staircase looking at swirling water about head high, as everything was banging around. It finally went down to about a foot high that night. I stayed overnight, put on boots, and started shoveling almost three feet of sand out of the basement. Everything we had raised up off the floor was now gone — every memory, every keepsake; my office, gone. The walls were smashed and it smelled like raw sewage. It became an obsession to clean this mess.

“After that, the world slowed to a halt,” Thomas recalled.

There was no heat, and winter was destroying the house almost instantly.

Takoda and Jess stayed in Brooklyn, while for two weeks Thomas shoveled sand and carried belongings out of the house. He said their living room was soiled with dripping filth and boot prints.

Not one organization, including the Red Cross, came to his community’s aid, he says.

“No info ever came from the city, the government, or any media outlets. We kept Googling or using social media to find info on what to do.

“Gas shortages forced me to leave my wife and little guy in Brooklyn, so we could preserve gas. It was harder and harder and getting colder.”

Maybe a month or so later, food and cleaning products from church groups, the Red Cross, and citizens started flowing in, Thomas recalls.



Caroline Enz and her two sons’ basement apartment in her parents’ house was hit hard by Sandy.



(Above) Far Rockaway residents and surfers Thomas Brookins with wife Jessica and son Takoda. (Right) Thomas took this shot a day after Sandy, when his block was flooded.



"We had my good friends with the FDNY come and rewire my boiler and heater; we were excited to be warm while working, but it was a race against mold now."

Then they learned about the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Thomas said the agency came in with six workers, looked at the heating, and told him he couldn't keep the repaired heater because it was unsafe, since unlicensed work was done on it. So, workers yanked it out and said they'd replace it. It took months.

Thomas and his wife couldn't stay with their friends any longer, so they headed to a local airport hotel.

"Takoda was sent away to my sister's house in Maryland; it was so hard to be apart from him, but it was just too cold and unsafe."

Eventually, with help from friends, neighbors, and folks from all over New York and beyond, Thomas and Jess finally cleaned out everything "to a raw shell." Finally, clothing was being donated and they had heat, nearly four months later. "It's passed the one-year anniversary of Sandy and we're still rebuilding," said Thomas. "All of my friends and neighbors had the exact same things happen. The neighborhood is still not rebuilt; roads are temporary blobs of black tar, curbs are still chunky, and there's no sign of the boardwalk in site. I still don't think people understand how bad it was."

Looking back, Thomas said he found out how "humbling" Mother Nature's power really was.

And he and his wife discovered something else: it turned out the traumatic circumstances, coupled with Sandy's impact, had affected their son, a sweet, bright child. In fact, Thomas said he believes his

neighbors' kids were impacted in similar ways.

Thomas says sometimes his son has nightmares and has some issues in school, since he was so isolated during the last couple of years. He tends to play independently rather than with groups.

"Takoda is now 3; he was a trooper through it all. We're just now hearing him say things he couldn't say before like, 'The big storm came and trashed the street.' Quite often we hear him playing and using the 'big scary storm' as the distress, which his 'heroes' have to remedy. His language skills are amazing; with a vocabulary that shocks us daily."

"He'll be fine, but we hope he pulls through it all, and the storm fades into a little corner somewhere in his memory," Thomas adds.

Enz family

As Sandy continued its campaign of destruction — unleashing fierce winds and dislodging homes, shops, cars and boats as if they were toys — a single mom with two boys living in the basement of her parents' home in Howard Beach was praying that the entire house wouldn't be totaled.

Flood waters turned Caroline Enz's backyard into a small lake and entered her apartment, rising to eight feet. She recalls how she and her sons, Justin and Matthew, scrambled to find their valuables and salvage whatever they could.

"On the night Sandy came, my oldest son Justin and I were in our rooms when we heard the water start coming in through the AC unit in his room, and then through the windows. We moved as fast as we could to get as much stuff out of the rooms, before

the water would consume the place we once called home."

They went without heat, hot water, and electricity for more than three weeks.

The day after Sandy, Caroline said it looked like a bomb exploded in the neighborhood.

"There were boats and cars everywhere. People's homes were gone and their stuff lined up on the street to be thrown away; whole lives gone in one night," she remembered. "At that time neighbors became family and we all banded together to make sure no one went without a meal, or a warm blanket and coat, clothes and shoes, or just a simple hug to say, 'Together, we are all gonna get through this!' There wasn't one person in my neighborhood that wasn't affected by this storm. People drowned that night in basement apartments or trapped on rooftops — it was so unreal!"

But they helped each other get through.

Caroline said their lives were really tough that following year.

"Not easy when you're used to having your own and have to impose, and live with other people."

They received some money from FEMA, but not much.

"Enough to start to fix but not enough to finish, which makes building back harder," she said, frustrated. "As for my neighbors, they're no longer my neighbors — they're now my family; adopted during a very hard time in all our lives. A family that bonded together."

She added, "There are some who are still fixing and some that are not even back yet, but each day, more people are back and we get closer to

having a normal way of living."

The family just recently moved back and has to start over, but Caroline says she's grateful that at least they have their own beds, blankets, and pillows, and aren't sleeping apart, on other people's couches.

Local volunteers

The Howard Beach and Breezy Point communities struggled to make it after Sandy's devastation, and a Middle Village, Queens, songwriter and filmmaker was sitting in front of her TV, like millions of fellow New Yorkers, watching the unbelievable images before her. Lori Martini felt lucky to have heat, power, and a bit of food in her fridge, but she also had an overwhelming sense of guilt: so many people were suddenly homeless, cold, and hungry. Compelled to give back and help those in need, she decided to get out there and take action.

As luck would have it, her friend, Forest Hills resident Frank Kenna — the chief deputy at the Queens County Clerk's Office — reached out to Lori during the relief efforts, and they teamed up to volunteer.

"After Sandy struck, I noticed Lori kept posting about it on Facebook, and could tell that she wanted to help. So I informed her about one particular volunteer effort being headed up by the Woodhaven Residents' Block Association, whose president is my friend, Ed Wendell. I picked her up in my minivan, along with items we both donated, and then drove to Woodhaven, where we packed the car as much as we could.

"We then drove to Howard Beach and delivered everything to state Sen. Joseph Addabbo's office, where he had set up a distribution center," Frank recalls.

• • •

Life will never be the same for these families, but thanks to the help of big-hearted volunteers and neighbors banding together, communities are coming back. They say every cloud has a silver lining. Well, a year after Sandy wreaked havoc on Thomas Brookins's beloved Rockaway Beach community, it seems that new businesses, eateries, and shops have been popping up here and there. Thomas reports that surprisingly, the area has been gradually transforming into a popular vacation spot for city folk and even some celebs, who are buying waterfront homes.

Apparently they fell in love with it when they came to volunteer after Sandy.

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Home alone

How to know if your child is ready

BY JAMIE LOBER

When it comes to staying home alone, parents are often unsure about how to judge whether their child is ready. It is important that you do not rush into things, even if your child appears confident in his ability to take care of himself while you are away.

“A lot of states do not have a legal age limit or cut-off point for when children can stay home alone, so it is about making sure that you know if your child is comfortable,” said Dr. Kirsten Cullen Sharma, clinical assistant professor in the department of child and adolescent psychiatry, child study center at New York University Langone.

According to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services website, “Some children are responsible, intelligent, and independent enough to be left alone at 12 or 13 years of age. Likewise, there are some teenagers who are too irresponsible or have special needs that limit their ability to be safe if they are left alone.

Parents and guardians need to make intelligent, reasoned decisions regarding these matters, asking, ‘What has the child done in the past to show you he is able to take on this kind of responsibility?’”

Sharma says that one of the ways to help your child feel com-

fortable is by “progressively letting him stay home for longer and longer periods of time.”

Each child has different emotions regarding the potential responsibility.

“I work with a mom who is going through this with her 13-year-old daughter who is nervous to stay home, and the mom is working a plan with her where the first day she went to the gym in her apartment building for 15 minutes, the next day to the store across the street for 20 minutes,” said Sharma.

Every couple of days, you can attempt to do something and let your child stay home alone to build up his belief that he can do it. Knowing how to respond in various situations can help get him to that point.

“A big part is planning ahead, so you need to have a safety or emergency plan and make sure you know a neighbor who is home next door,” said Sharma. Be sure your child knows how to contact you, even if it just sending a text message every half hour, so they have a check-in plan.

Practice can make all the difference. Your child may feel better prepared if he has a chance to role-play an emergency situation or plan before he is allowed to stay home for a short period of time.

“Practice calling an emergency contact person if the child gets injured or a fire starts in the house,” said Sharma. You should also practice the scenario of someone knocking at the door.

“Let your child know to never open the door to strangers and always check before opening the door to anyone by looking through a peephole or window first,” said Melanie Pipkin Kozel, media relations lead at the American Red



Practice can make all the difference. Your child may feel better prepared if he has a chance to role-play an emergency situation or plan before he is allowed to stay home for a short period of time.



Cross. He should inform you or an emergency contact person if someone comes to the door.

"Make sure he knows not to go outside to check an unusual noise," said Kozel. Knowing how to turn the security alarm on and off can be helpful as well.

Some kids are able to cope with situations easier than others.

"Talk about whether your child is mature enough and whether he is nervous or scared, since that is a huge part of the picture — even if he is mature," said Sharma. Discussing fear and anxieties is beneficial.

"Have your child keep a journal of thoughts or feelings that he had while you were away and then at night, sit down and review what came up," said Sharma.

Some kids are more expressive than others.

"Some write down nothing and they are fine, and others say they were scared, because it was starting to get dark outside," said Sharma.

Depending on age, your child may be reassured knowing that you have a first aid kit that is accessible should he need it.

"He should know where to find working flashlights, a battery-operated radio, and extra batteries," said Kozel.

Set expectations. Some children are excited to stay home alone, because it builds confidence and self-esteem while others take advantage and have parties at their house or call people that they are not supposed to call.

"Your child should know exactly what he is allowed to do and that if he does something he is not supposed to do, that there is a consequence," said Sharma. "Most kids are okay, but some will push the limits, so parents have to be ready for that and have a plan in place in case that happens."

Keep safety in mind and consider child-proofing your home

before you leave.

"Knives, hand tools, power tools, razor blades, scissors, guns, ammunition and other objects that can cause injury should be stored in locked cabinets or locked storage areas," said Kozel. Potential poisons like detergents, pesticides, car-care fluids and polishes should also be out of reach. The same applies to medicines.

Give your child a run-down of what you will be doing. Let him know if he can have friends over or watch certain movies.

"He wants to know where you will be, how long you will be gone, and what time you are coming home," said Sharma.

It is hard to give a recommended age of when a child is ready to stay home alone, and mental health professionals set some loose boundaries.

"Most guidelines say that you should not leave a child who is younger than 12 home alone, but there are a couple of states that allow a child to stay home alone even at the age of 8," said Sharma. For kids who are babysitting or staying home with a younger sibling, the recommended age tends to be higher, around 15.

Offer feedback.

"Parents can review the night with their child, not just by asking how it went and saying the child did a great job, but actually sitting down and talking about what went really well, when they felt uncomfortable, and giving the child an opportunity to express any worries they have," said Sharma.

Try not to compare your child to his friends or neighbors' children. Accept him for who he is, and he will let you know when he is ready to stay home unsupervised.

Jamie Lober, author of Pink Power (www.getpinkpower.com), is dedicated to providing information on women's and pediatric health topics. She can be reached at jamie@getpinkpower.com.

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Outwit your appetite

You *can* control
the urge to
overeate with
these simple
methods

BY SANDRA GORDON

To control the urge to eat — and eat and eat — during the holidays and beyond, try these simple mealtime tricks, and see how easy it really is to lose the weight for good.

If you've ever polished off an entire bowl of potato chips while chitchatting at a party, or ploughed through a basket of tortilla chips before your entrée arrives, you might think you have little control over your appetite. Yet, research shows that the drive to eat often doesn't have much to do with actual hunger.

"Your appetite can be influenced by the mere sight of food, the portion sizes, and what the people around you are eating or ordering," says Dr. Gerard J. Musante, author of "The Structure House Weight Loss Plan." Those are just a few of the factors that cue you to eat when you didn't plan to, or overindulge when you only wanted a taste. Awareness is key to controlling your appetite.

Lighten up, literally

Studies show that dimmed lights at meals can also make you eat more. In restaurants with soft lighting, for example, consumers tend to stay longer and maybe enjoy an unplanned dessert or an extra drink.

Low lighting can also make



you feel less inhibited and self-conscious; you're more apt to eat more, especially when you're with others.

You can't control a restaurant's lighting level, but you can have a skim latte as dessert. At home, keep the lights bright at meals and reserve candlelight dinners for special occasions.

And our temptation-taming tactics can help.

Temptation trigger: Generous plates and serving spoons; wide drinking glasses.

The bigger the plate and serving utensil, the more you'll dish out. One study had people eat at an ice cream social, and those who were given a large bowl and a three-ounce scooper ate 53 percent more ice cream than those given a smaller bowl and a two-ounce scooper. With beverages, research shows that people pour 28 percent more in short, wide glasses than into tall, skinny ones, says Dr. Brian Wansink, director of the food and brand lab at Cornell University.

Slimming solution: Downsize plates and utensils. If your dinner dishes are larger than the standard 10.5 inches, use a salad plate for your main dish. Try a tip from Asian cultures and artfully arrange what's on your plate. A small serving of sirloin, for example, will be less likely to leave you hungering for more when sliced and fanned on a pretty plate. Also, use smaller serving utensils, such as soup spoons for doling out portions. Replace any squat tumblers with tall, slender drinking glasses.

Temptation trigger: Too many choices.

If you always try to have something new for lunch and dinner, your meals are probably more of a calorie splurge than you realize.

"A varied diet stimulates your appetite," says Dr. Hollie A. Raynor, a registered nurse and adjunct assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior research at Brown

Medical School in Providence, Rhode Island. The more flavors, textures, and color a particular meal offers and the less often you eat something, the more you'll be tempted to load up your plate, because the food looks good or you're curious about how it will taste.

Slimming solution: Downplay diversity. Come up with a standard repertoire of meals. It's easy to get into the habit of having the same healthy breakfast (whole-grain cereal, skim milk, and fruit) five days a week, so why not do the same with dinner? Raynor suggests rotating among five or six of your favorite healthy core entrees. You can branch out one night a week, if you feel you need to. To beat boredom and boost your diet's overall nutrient content, vary the fruit and veggies you use in the repeat meals. Dessert can be the same small dish of low-fat yogurt every night, jazzed up with almonds, walnuts, strawberries, kiwi, fresh pineapple, or whatever's in season.

At holiday parties and other events with an appetizer or buffet spread, "Follow the rule of two," suggests Wansink. That is, don't put more than two foods on your plate at any given time. By doing so, "you intuitively limit your choices, while focusing on your favorite foods, so you don't feel deprived," he says. In one study, Wansink conducted, participants who followed that guideline ended up eating 36 percent less than those who didn't over the course of an evening.

Another trick: When buying food that comes in flavors, such as yogurt and salad dressing, buy only one flavor at a time. One study found that



At holiday parties with a buffet spread, follow the “rule of two.” That is, don’t put more than two foods on your plate at any given time.

those who were offered three yogurt flavors ate 23 percent more than those who were offered only one.

Temptation trigger: Eating while doing anything else.

Most people are guilty of driving, watching TV, or reading while noshing on something.

“When we multitask with food, we consume more without realizing it and sacrifice a feeling of satisfaction,” says Dr. Susan Albers, a psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic Family Health Center in Wooster, Ohio, and author of “Eat Q: Unlock the Weight-loss Power of Emotional Intelligence.”

It’s an easy way to consume more without even realizing it and sacrificing a feeling of satisfaction. Albers relates the story of a client who had a habit of eating lunch while driving from one job to another.

“One day, she was so distracted

with driving and thinking about her job that she actually had to open her lunch bag at a stoplight to see if her sandwich was gone,” Albers says. (It was.) Sound familiar?

Slimming solution: Make meals important.

“No matter how busy you are, find a distraction-free spot to sit and eat,” suggests Albers. Make a habit of taking one mindful bite at the beginning of each meal and then putting your utensil down. This serves as a speed bump and slows the pace of the entire meal. For a similar effect, ditch your fork and knife for chopsticks, no matter what type of cuisine you’re having. And if you can’t avoid eating while doing something else, pre-portion your food and tell yourself, “No seconds.”

Temptation trigger: The food on the counter.

If you frequently cross paths with

the office candy bowl, you probably realize that the mere sight of food can cause unplanned eating. In a study in which office workers kept Hershey kisses in either see-through dishes or in opaque, lidded jars, those with the see-through dishes ate two more chocolates daily. That translates to 50 calories a day, which adds up to an extra five pounds per year.

Slimming solution: Stash food out of sight. At home, keep cereal, crackers, and holiday treats hidden in a top cabinet, and store extras in the basement or pantry. Research shows that people tend to store their inventory in visible areas consume it quickly until it’s depleted to manageable levels. Also, “wrap leftovers in aluminum foil, not plastic wrap,” adds Musante, so you won’t constantly be tempted when opening the refrigerator.

At work, place treats in dark con-

tainers, preferably in a distant office refrigerator, not in your desk drawer. You’ll eat even less if it takes effort, such as having to reach or take a walk to access food. If the communal goodie jar resides on the desk of someone who sits nearby, offer to fill it — and then do so with treats you don’t like.

Temptation trigger: Entrée envy.

“Research shows that you can be influenced by other people’s food decisions,” says Musante. When out to eat, if everyone orders cocktails, appetizers and dessert, you’re apt to go with the flow.

Slimming solution: Be the first to order. Speak up quickly and order a salad and grilled salmon.

“You’ll have a positive effect on what others choose — and will be less likely to see lots of tempting foods,” says Musante. If everyone wants dessert, order one and split it.



GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

Why you can't rush feeding milestones

Cathy Derus's daughter is five months old and still nursing full time. But the first-time mother is keenly aware her baby will soon begin the transition to solid food.

A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that parents are often uneducated about important eating milestones. According to the study, 40 percent of parents give solid food to their babies before they reach the age of four months, and nine percent give solids to babies as early as four weeks.

Readiness and pacing

Usually around six months of age, babies are interested in solids, especially when they are able to sit up.

"They should also be able to have good head control, reducing tongue thrust, and willingness to lean forward toward foods and sit back when done," according to certified

pediatric nutrition specialist Florence DiMarco.

Some mothers are proud their babies can handle the spoon earlier. But DiMarco disagrees.

"Solids initiation is exciting, but starting too soon — before six months — does not mean that babies are developing better."

Cup drinking can also be encouraged around the same time solids begin.

At one time, rice cereal was the first solid food, followed by other single-grain cereals, then fruit and

vegetables, and finally meat. Now, there is no strict sequence of which solids should be introduced first.

DiMarco recommends offering one new food a time, then waiting for a couple of days to see if baby shows signs of an allergic reaction.

"There is also concern for possible food allergy or intolerance if solids are started too soon," she adds. "Nevertheless, delaying solids initiation for more than eight months does not prove to prevent food allergy either."

What hasn't changed is the use of cow's milk or its alternatives in the dairy case. They are not recommended before the age 1.



Pomegranate Relish

Makes two to four servings
Prep time: 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

For POM Molasses:

3 cups POM Wonderful 100% Pomegranate Juice
1/4 cup sugar
1 lemon, juiced

For Relish:

1/2 cup arils from POM Wonderful Pomegranates
1 tablespoon POM Molasses
3 tablespoons finely diced shallots
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon sliced flat-leaf parsley
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS:

POM Molasses: Combine pomegranate juice, sugar, and juice from



one lemon in a saucepan; bring to a simmer. Reduce until a very thick syrup forms that can thickly coat the back of a spoon, then cool to room temperature.

Relish: Prepare fresh arils. Place the shallots, lemon juice, and 1/4 teaspoon salt in a small bowl and let sit five minutes. Whisk in the POM Molasses and then the olive oil. Stir in the fresh arils and the parsley.

Taste for balance and seasoning. Suggest serving on toasted crostini with brie.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: 30 calories (0 calories from fat), 1 g protein, 7 g carbohydrates, 1 g total fat (0 g saturated), 0 mg cholesterol, 95 mg sodium, 1 g dietary fiber, 2 g sugars, 36 mcg vitamin A, 4 mg vitamin C.

Suzanne Goin, Chef & Restaurateur, Lucques, A.O.C., and Tavern Restaurants, Los Angeles, Calif.

The path to healthy eating

By eight or 10 months, most babies are able to sit up independently, grasp finger foods, and able to start to chew. By 12 months, their skills get more and more refined for grasping foods and chewing.

Of course, fresh, one-ingredient foods are preferable to prepackaged items with food coloring, preservatives, or nitrites and nitrates.

Derus is looking forward to her baby's next stage.

"While I was pregnant with Monica, we joked we had a foodie baby on our hands. Now that she's about to start eating solids, we can't wait for her to taste the foods she smelled during our cooking and eating."

Christine Palumbo is a registered dietitian nutritionist in Naperville, Ill. Follow her on Twitter @PalumboRD, Facebook at Christine Palumbo Nutrition, or Chris@ChristinePalumbo.com.

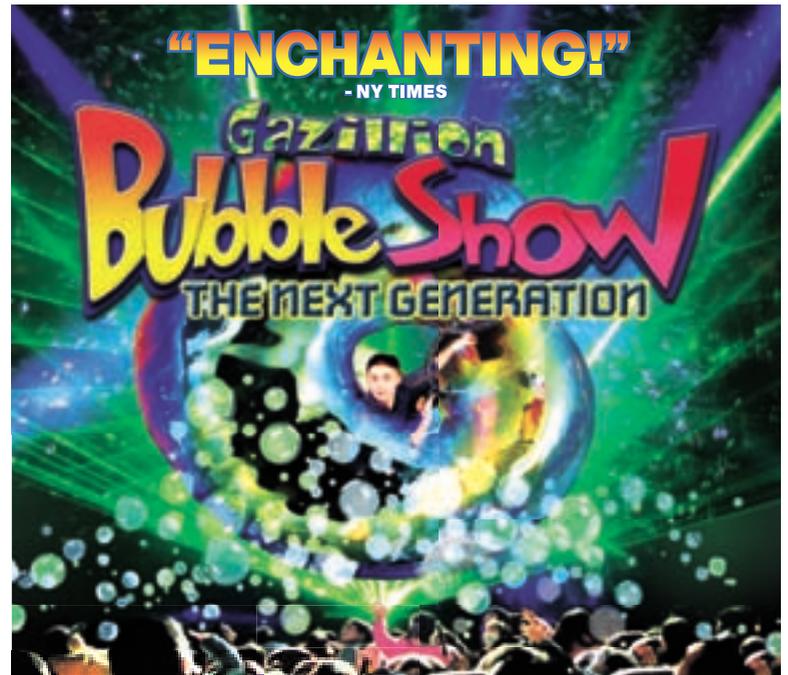
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HEALTHY LIVING

DANIELLE SULLIVAN

Positively pregnant

Every mother can recall the moment when she found out she was pregnant. However, at the initial sign of a late period, the first place most women run to is not their doctor — it's their pharmacy, to purchase a home pregnancy test. Years ago, at-home pregnancy tests were confusing. Did you need to see two lines? What if one was faint? Were you pregnant? What if two appeared ever so slightly to make themselves known? Or were you really just imagining it, because you wanted it so badly?

Lindsay Young from Tribeca remembers when she first suspected she was pregnant.

"I was only a few days late, but I was so excited to start a family. I bought a test and the results were so confusing, I honestly had no idea if I was pregnant or not after taking it. So I bought another the next day, and it said I was not pregnant. No little line ever showed up. But a week later, still no period, so I bought another that said a plus sign would indicate a pregnancy. I received a minus sign."

Disappointed, Young says she spent \$50 dollars with all the tests and none ever showed a positive result.

"Over those three weeks, while I waited for a doctor's visit, I thought I had a really severe case of premenstrual syndrome and emotional mood swings, until they took a blood test at my midwife's office that confirmed I was actually pregnant!"

Today, more pregnancy tests take the guesswork out of the big question: am I pregnant? Once you discover the answer and find out that you do indeed have a baby on the way, the next question is almost always, how far along am I? It would be so nice to know how many weeks pregnant you might be during the anxious days between a positive pregnancy test and a doctor's visit. Now one manufacturer is making that possible.

ClearBlue, a company that has offered pregnancy tests for years, has recently unveiled its newest product, the Clearblue Advanced Pregnancy Test with Weeks Estimator. It is the only at-home test available that offers a newly pregnant woman an estimate on how many weeks



pregnant she may be by measuring the amount of human chorionic gonadotropin hormone in the urine at the time of the test. It is 99 percent accurate in confirming a pregnancy and 93 percent accurate in determining how many weeks pregnant. The results show one of the following choices: Not Pregnant; Pregnant 1-2; Pregnant 2-3; Pregnant 3+.

Dr. Rebecca Brightman, Clinical Instructor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and an OB-GYN in private practice in New York City, explains that knowing how far along a woman is in her pregnancy provides valuable benefits.

"This test takes two measurements instead of one, giving women two essential answers and more information. The additional information provided helps patients before the very first appointment. Based on test results, and how far along the patient is, that information will be

helpful to me as an OB-GYN when interacting and treating patients."

This is especially helpful for women who have irregular periods and inconsistent cycles because in these women, the typical calendar tracking method of determining a pregnancy may be faulty. Dr. Brightman notes that this test is no replacement for a doctor's visit, but rather something you would do before you can see the doctor or midwife.

"Like all home pregnancy tests, results should be confirmed by a doctor, especially when making decisions about future prenatal care. Always consult a doctor if you suspect you are pregnant and to confirm, date, and monitor pregnancy."

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, has worked as a writer and editor in the parenting world for more than 10 years. Sullivan also writes about pets and parenting for Disney's Babble.com. Find Danielle on her blog, Some Puppy To Love.

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Calendar

DECEMBER



Sundog Theatre

'A Christmas Carol' comes to the Rock

Don't say "Bah humbug!" to Sundog Theatre's "A Christmas Carol" at the Center for Performing Arts at the College of Staten Island on Dec. 7.

This time-honored tale of the true meaning of Christmas features the ever-memorable Ebenezer Scrooge and the Ghosts of Christmas who pay the miser-turned-spendthrift a visit on

Christmas Eve.

The one-hour production promises delightful fun for children of all ages, and puts the spirit back into the holidays.

"A Christmas Carol," on Dec. 7 at 3 pm and 7 pm. \$12 and \$15.

Center for the Performing Arts at CSI [2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani Street in Willowbrook, (718) 982-2787; www.cfashows.com].

Submit a listing

This calendar is dedicated to bringing our readers the most comprehensive list of events in your area. But to do so, we need your help!

Send your listing request to stateniscalendar@cnglocal.com — and we'll take care of the rest. Please e-mail requests more than three weeks prior to the event to ensure we have enough time to get it in. And best of all, it's FREE!

SAT, NOV. 30

ON STATEN ISLAND

Le Petit Chef: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; staten-islandkids.org; 11 am-12:30 pm; \$30 (\$50 non-members).

Children learn how to chop, dice, stir, measure and cook in this six-week course designed for 3 to 5 year olds. Pre-registration required.

Holiday craft fair: Alice Austen House, 2 Hylan Blvd. at Edgewater Street; (718) 816-4506; www.aliceaustentn.org; 11 am-5 pm.

Local artisans present handmade wares including children's toys; garden herbal spices; greeting cards, hand-made soap and lots of jewelry. Raffles and refreshments for sale.

"Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs": New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2 pm; Free.

Disney's classic film.

SUN, DEC. 1

ON STATEN ISLAND

Nature crafts: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 11 am; Free.

Rangers lead children in making eco-friendly crafts.

Holiday craft fair: 11 am-5 pm. Alice Austen House. See Saturday, Nov. 30.

Under the microscope: High Rock Gate, Nevada Ave. and Rockland Avenue; (718) 351-3450; 1-3 pm; Free.

Children 8 years and older explore pine cones and conifers after a short collection trek through the grounds. Registration required.



Get a 'Clue'

We are gonna see "Blue's Clues," we are gonna see "Blue's Clues" — at the St. George Theatre on Dec. 30!

You know what to do: put on your thinking cap with Blue and Steve and, in this show, try to find all the clues that reveal the most spectacular place of all. Steve and Blue bring on the fun in this interactive musical adventure for chil-

dren ages 3 and older. The man and his dog know you can do it, because you're really smart!

Bring your camera for the meet-and-greet that follows the performance.

"Blue's Clues Live!" on Dec. 30 at 6 pm. Tickets are \$16 and \$22.

St. George Theatre [35 Hyatt St. between St. Mark's Place and Central Avenue in St. George, (718) 442-2900; www.stgeorgetheatre.com].

MON, DEC. 2

ON STATEN ISLAND

Holiday tales: College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani Street; (718) 982-5678; theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$9.

Musical collection of holiday stories from different cultures.

Teen Cafe: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

Hang out with friends, bring snacks, soda, homework or browse the web. For tweens and teens, 12 to 18 years old.

Read aloud: Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nypl.org; 4-4:30 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 enjoy books.

TUES, DEC. 3

ON STATEN ISLAND

Holiday tales: 10 am and 11:30 am.

College of Staten Island. See Monday, Dec. 2.

Tutoring: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 3:30-5:30 pm; Free.

Children in pre-K through eighth grade get homework help in math and English. First come-first served.

Bracelet workshop: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

Make a friendship bracelet.

WED, DEC. 4

ON STATEN ISLAND

Holiday tales: 10 am and 11:30 am. College of Staten Island. See Monday, Dec. 2.

Pre-school storytime: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 11 am - noon; Free.

Children listen to a classic story book.

Music classes: Oakwood Heights Community Church, 345 Guyon Ave.; (718) 207-1128; mary@sifamilymusic.com; 11 am - noon; Free.

Families channel their inner voices for this workshop. RSVP required.

Teen club: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

Young adults 12 to 18 years old discuss anime, draw, play games and even do homework.

Read aloud: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 4-4:30 pm; Free.

Children 3 years old and up finger play, learn action rhymes and color.

FURTHER AFIELD

Franken Science: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; 3:30-6 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children in grades three to four become mad scientists and learn all about science.

THURS, DEC. 5

ON STATEN ISLAND

Read aloud: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

For children 3 to 12 years of age.

FURTHER AFIELD

Weird Science: Grades 1-2: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; 3:30-6 pm; Free with museum admission.

Explore the weird and fascinating world of science with fun hands-on activities.

FRI, DEC. 6

ON STATEN ISLAND

Toddler Time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 10:30-11:30 am; Free.

Little ones 3 to 5 years old enjoy play time with a caregiver or parent.

Doodlebug FunTime: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 227-8839; www.nycgovparks.org; 1 pm; Free.

Kathleen Hagen tells stories, plays music, and arts and crafts for children 18 months to 4 years old with a care-

Continued on page 30

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

Continued from page 29

giver. Registration required. Series 1.

Grand illumination: Conference House, 298 Satterlee St. at Hylan Blvd.; (718) 984-6036; 7 pm; Free with museum admission.

Join in with Christmas carols, have hot cider, cookies and view the beautifully lit grounds.

FURTHER AFIELD

A Night at the Museum Sleepovers: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; 6 pm; \$145 per person, \$135 (members).

Break out your sleeping bags and experience the museum like never before. This unique after-hours program will thrill kids ages 6 to 13 and their caregivers.

SAT, DEC. 7

ON STATEN ISLAND

Le Petit Chef: 11 am-12:30 pm. Staten Island Children's Museum. See Saturday, Nov. 30.

"Over the Hedge": New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nysl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

DreamWork's hit animated show about hungry critters going over the hedge.

"A Christmas Carol": Center for the Arts, College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd at Morani Street; (718) 982-2787; www.cfashows.com; 3 and 7 pm; \$12 (\$15).

The Charles Dickens classic.

SUN, DEC. 8

ON STATEN ISLAND

Colonial Christmas: Conference House, 298 Satterlee St. at Hylan Blvd.; (718) 984-6036; 11 am-3 pm; \$3.

The market features fine crafts, Steve Nutt redware wooden toys, home-baked goods, and hot apple cider and cookies.

Tree Lighting: Historic Richmond Town, 441 Clarke Ave. at Tysen Court; (718) 351-1611; www.historicrichmondtown.org; 1-3 pm and 5 pm; \$2 admission to courtroom; \$2 horse and wagon ride.

Watch artisans make glittering ornaments; take a pix with Santa, or hear the carolers present holiday songs. It's the season in the historic village. And of course the annual lighting of the tree.

Natural Science Club: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 2-3:30 pm; Free.

Children 8 to 12 years old meet with Clay Wolney and discuss various science topics.

MON, DEC. 9

ON STATEN ISLAND

"The Nutcracker": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

The story of a young girl's encounter with strange and wonderful creatures at Christmastime.

Teen Cafe: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Monday, Dec. 2.

Read aloud: Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nysl.org; 4-4:30 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 enjoy books.

TUES, DEC. 10

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Santa Claus Meets the Wicked Wizard": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

The wicked wizard is headed toward the North Pole. Grab your mittens, buckle the boots and hop aboard Edie the Elf's sleigh to help save Santa.

Tutoring: 3:30-5:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Tuesday, Dec. 3.

WED, DEC. 11

ON STATEN ISLAND

"The Holiday that Almost Wasn't": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

The holiday season is almost brought to disaster but dancing reindeer, help to avert the mess.

Teen club: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Dec. 4.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Dec. 4.

THURS, DEC. 12

ON STATEN ISLAND

Mistletones: College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

Rock out from the friends of Squeaky Clean to holiday favorites to stomp your feet to.

Read aloud: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Dec. 5.

Winter wonderland: Carousel Willowbrook Park, Eton Place and Richmond Avenue; (718) 981-3335; info@constructrelief.org; 6-9 pm; Free.

constructrelief.org; 6-9 pm; Free.

Yummy food, holiday train ride, carousel, and of course Santa.

FRI, DEC. 13

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Christmas Carol": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

Old Scrooge learns the true meaning of Christmas through visits with the Ghosts of Christmas, past, present and future.

Story time: Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nysl.org; 10:30 am; Free.

For children 18 to 36 months and their caregivers.

Doodlebug FunTime: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 227-8839; www.nycgovparks.org; 1 pm; Free.

Kathleen Hagen tells stories, plays music, and arts and crafts for children 18 months to 4 years old with a caregiver. Registration required. Series 2.

Winter wonderland: 6-9 pm. Carousel Willowbrook Park. See Thursday, Dec. 12.

"The Christmas Show": St. George Theatre, 35 Hyatt St. between St. Mark's Place and Central Avenue; (718) 442-2900; www.stgeorgetheatre.com; 7 pm; \$10, \$20, \$30, \$40.

A two hour, high energy night of songs and dances featuring popular tunes including "We Need a Little Christmas," "Let it Snow," "Silver Bells," and "O Holy Night."

SAT, DEC. 14

ON STATEN ISLAND

Le Petit Chef: 11 am-12:30 pm. Staten Island Children's Museum. See Saturday, Nov. 30.

Craft workshop: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 1-3 pm; \$12 (\$10 members).

Artist Kathy Trimarco leads the 10th annual family craft event where participants create pieces inspired by nature. For children 8 years and older. Pre-registration and pre-payment required.

"Peter Pan": New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nysl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

Wendy and her brothers embark on a fantastic journey to Never, Never Land.

Candlelight tours: Historic Richmond Town, 441 Clarke Ave. at Tysen Court; (718) 351-1611; www.historicrichmondtown.org; 5-8:30 pm; \$22 (members; \$10 for children under 12).

Visitors of all ages take a journey through 300 years of tradition and enjoy a traditional Wassail Bowl Reception in the courthouse. Reservations required.

Winter wonderland: 6-9 pm. Carousel Willowbrook Park. See Thursday, Dec. 12.

"The Christmas Show": 7 pm. St. George Theatre. See Friday, Dec. 13.

SUN, DEC. 15

ON STATEN ISLAND

Games and gifts: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 2-3 pm; \$4 (\$2 members).

Make a recycled craft, gifts and games from materials that would have been thrown away. Transform a bottle into a piggy bank and so much more. For children 7 years and older. All materials provided. Pre-registration and pre-payment required.

Explorers of the Wild: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 2-3:30 pm; Free.

Naturalist Clay Wolney teaches children 6 to 10 years old about the environment and science.

"The Christmas Show": 7 pm. St. George Theatre. See Friday, Dec. 13.

MON, DEC. 16

ON STATEN ISLAND

Mistletones: 10 am and 11:30 am. College of Staten Island. See Thursday, Dec. 12.

Teen Cafe: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Monday, Dec. 2.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. Huguenot Public Library. See Monday, Dec. 9.

TUES, DEC. 17

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Shoemaker and the Elves": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

Based on the classic fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, the story is the tale about a poor shoemaker who is visited by magical elves.

Tutoring: 3:30-5:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Tuesday, Dec. 3.

Bracelet workshop: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Dec. 3.

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

WED, DEC. 18

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Twas the Night Before Christmas": College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Blvd. at Morani St.; (718) 982-5678; www.theatertrips.org; 10 am and 11:30 am; \$8.

And all through the house. Inspired by the poem, this performance introduces Santa and the true miracle of the holidays.

Teen club: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Dec. 4.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Dec. 4.

THURS, DEC. 19

ON STATEN ISLAND

Read aloud: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Dec. 5.

Winter stories: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 4-5 pm; Free.

Children hear a story and then make a fun craft.

"Monsters University": Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nypl.org; 5-7 pm; Free.

Go back to college with Sully, Mike, and the gang. Free popcorn, snacks and beverages.

FRI, DEC. 20

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Christmas Carol": 10 am and 11:30 am. College of Staten Island. See Friday, Dec. 13.

Toddler Time: 10:30-11:30 am. Dongan Hills Library. See Friday, Dec. 6.

SAT, DEC. 21

ON STATEN ISLAND

Jr. Science Club: Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl. corner of Wall Street; (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; 10 am-noon; \$8 (\$5 members).

Seeing isn't always believing. Teens learn to examine objects critically and closely.

Le Petit Chef: 11 am-12:30 pm. Staten Island Children's Museum. See Saturday, Nov. 30.

Welcome to winter: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 1-2 pm; \$8 (\$6 members).

Children celebrate the first day of Winter by making a fun craft and doing activities. Children 4 to 8 years old must be accompanied by an adult



Photo by Carol Rosegg

A 'Story' for the ages

Who can forget the story of Ralphie in the classic holiday movie "A Christmas Story?" The award-winning musical adaptation returns to the stage at the Theater at Madison Square Garden this month for a limited run from Dec. 11 through 29, just in time for Christmas.

With its catchy tunes and clever choreography, your entire family will surely be entertained. Plus, it's being co-produced by the film's original Ralphie, Peter Billingsley. We triple dog dare you not to have a great time.

"A Christmas Story: the Musical," Dec. 11 through Dec. 29, Wednesdays at 2 pm and 7:30 pm, Thursdays at 11 am and 7:30 pm, Fridays at 7:30 pm, Saturdays at 1 pm and 6:30 pm, and Sundays at 1 pm and 7:30 pm, and Dec. 26 and Dec. 27 at 2 pm. Tickets range from \$49 and \$199.

Theater at Madison Square Garden [Four Pennsylvania Plaza at W. 33rd Street and Eighth Avenue in the Garment District, (866) 858-0008 www.achristmasstorythemusical.com].

chaperone. Pre-registration and pre-payment required.

SUN, DEC. 22

ON STATEN ISLAND

Wildlife walk: Wolfe's Pond Park Comfort Station, Cornelia Ave. and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; 1 pm; Free.

Urban rangers lead you to the best places to view the wildlife in the preserve. From falcons and salamanders to deer and seals.

MON, DEC. 23

ON STATEN ISLAND

Craft time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 2:30

pm; Free.

Children 5 years and older make a holiday project.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. Huguenot Public Library. See Monday, Dec. 9.

SAT, DEC. 28

ON STATEN ISLAND

"The Black Cauldron": New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

Disney film about the powers of the Black Cauldron.

MON, DEC. 30

ON STATEN ISLAND

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. Huguenot

Public Library. See Monday, Dec. 9.

"Blues Clues": St. George Theatre, 35 Hyatt St. between St. Mark's Place and Central Avenue; (718) 442-2900; www.stgeorgetheatre.com; 6 pm; \$16, \$22.

Blue and Steve lead the audience on a clue-based journey.

TUES, DEC. 31

ON STATEN ISLAND

Bracelet workshop: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Dec. 3.

LONG-RUNNING

ON STATEN ISLAND

Storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; Tuesdays and Saturdays, 10:30 am.; Free.

Children listen to a different story each week.

"War and Peace": Alice Austen House, 2 Hylan Blvd. at Edgewater Street; (718) 816-4507; Tuesdays - Sundays, 11 am-5 pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$3.

The exhibit by Melissa Cacciola features Tintype portraits documenting the armed forces from the Civil War to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Kidz cook: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; statenisland-kids.org; Saturdays, 2,3 and 4 pm, Now - Fri, Jan. 3, 2014; Free with museum admission.

Children experiment with all types of food.

Homework and Lounge: Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nypl.org; Tuesdays - Fridays, 2-5 pm, Now - Fri, Dec. 20; Free.

Teens hang out with friends, do homework, and have library time.

After-school book club: Historic Richmond Town, 441 Clarke Ave. at Tysen Court; (718) 351-1611; www.historicrichmondntown.org; Wednesdays, 3:30-4:30 pm, Now - Wed, Dec. 18; Free (plus cost of book).

It's back. Students in grades 4 to 7 read and discuss selected books covering major periods in history.

Story museum: Historic Richmond Town, 441 Clarke Ave. at Tysen Court; (718) 351-1611; www.historicrichmondntown.org; Thursdays, 11:30 am-12:30 pm and 2:30-3:30 pm, Now - Wed, Dec. 18; \$3 (Adults free).

Pre-schoolers listen to stories, do crafts, dance and sing.

"It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play": Snug Harbor Cultural Center,

Continued on page 32

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

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1000 Richmond Ter. between Snug Harbor Road and Tysen Street; (718) 448-2500; www.snug-harbor.org; Daily, 11 am, Fri, Dec. 6 – Sun, Dec. 22; \$35-\$40 (discount for seniors and students).

Presented by Harbor Lights Theatre, this presentation of the holiday classic harkens back to the glory days of radio.

Kids & Kritters: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (917) 751-0071; www.nycgovparks.org; Saturday, Nov. 23, 11 am; Saturday, Dec. 7, 11 am; Saturday, Dec. 14, 11 am; Free.

Nancy Zawada Clair leads children 5 to 7 years old with a parent on fun outdoor adventures throughout the center's grounds. Wear appropriate clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. Followed by a craft, story, and games.

Krafty Kids: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (917) 751-0071; www.nycgovparks.org; Saturday, Nov. 23, 1 pm; Saturday, Dec. 7, 1 pm; Saturday, Dec. 14, 1 pm; Free.

Join Nancy Zawada Clair for a crafty afternoon. pre-registration is required. For children 4 to 10 years old with a caregiver.

Up4Art: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; stateniskids.org; Saturdays and Sundays, 1, 2 and 3 pm, Sat, Dec. 7 – Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Free with museum admission.

Children create fun projects.

FURTHER AFIELD

Holiday train show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th St. and Kazimiroff Blvd., The Bronx; (718)

817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 am–6 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$20 (\$8 children).

Large scale model trains cover a wide variety of ground and features favorites including The Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, The Brooklyn Bridge, and many others.

The Butterfly Conservatory: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; \$27, \$16 (children).

This annual favorite features up to 500 live, free-flying tropical butterflies from Central, South, and North America, Africa, and Asia.

Origami Holiday Tree: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; Now – Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; Free with museum admission.

An annual museum tradition, the Origami Holiday Tree and two 19-foot Holiday Barosaurs welcome visitors throughout the holiday season, inspired by the new exhibition The Power of Poison.

Gingerbread Lane: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays – Fridays, 9:30 am–5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am – 6 pm, Now – Thurs, Dec. 12; Free with museum admission.

It's a 300-square-foot village made entirely of edible gingerbread, royal icing and candy, and is a contender for the Guinness World Record for the largest gingerbread exhibit.

Playground: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353;

www.nyscience.org; Weekdays, 10 am–5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am–6 pm, Now – Tues, Dec. 31; \$4 per person plus museum admission.

Children explore, discovery and have fun in this outdoor playground with slides, seesaws and pits as well as fog machines. Each session lasts 45 minutes; weather permitting.

Space Junk 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 am–5pm, Now – Tues, Dec. 31; \$6 (\$5 children) plus museum admission.

Children experience collisions, soar 22,000 miles above the earth and explore the challenges faced in protecting our planet, without ever leaving Queens.

Rocket Park Mini Golf: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am–6 pm, Now – Tues, Dec. 31; \$6 (\$5 children, plus museum admission).

Putt your way through a nine-hole miniature course that teaches the science of spaceflight.

Train show: Grand Central Station, 87 E. 42nd St., Manhattan; (718) 694-1600; Mondays – Thursdays, 8 am–8 pm, Fridays, 8 am –8pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am–6 pm, Now – Sun, Feb. 23, 2014; Free.

The annual show features Lionel's new limited edition model of Grand Central Terminal as well as illustrations from Next Stop Grand Central.

Frogs — A Chorus of Colors: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10

am–5:45 pm; Now – Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Suggested admission \$19, \$10.50 children, \$14.50 seniors and students.

See more than 150 live frogs, including 10 species of colorful dart-poison frogs. Learn about their importance to ecosystems and the threats they face in the wild.

Flight of the Butterflies in 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays – Fridays, 11 am, Noon & 2 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, Noon, 1, 2 & 3 pm.; \$6 (adults,) \$5 (children, students & seniors,) plus NY-SCI admission.

Join millions of real butterflies on an amazing journey to a remote and secret hideaway in this award-winning film.

"Fancy Nancy The Musical": McGinn/Cazale Theatre, 2162 Broadway at 76th Street; (212) 579-0528; vitaltheatre.org; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 am and 1 pm, Now – Sun, Dec. 8; \$39.50-\$59.50.

This musical is based on the popular children's books. Suitable for children ages 3-10.

"A Christmas Story": The Theater at Madison Square Garden, 2 Pennsylvania Plaza; (212) 465-6741; www.thegarden.com; Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2 pm; Thursday, Dec. 12, 11 am; Friday, Dec. 13, 7:30 pm; Saturday, Dec. 14, 2 pm; Sunday, Dec. 15, 1 pm; Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2 pm; Thursday, Dec. 19, 11 am; Friday, Dec. 20, 7:30 pm; Saturday, Dec. 21, 2 pm; Sunday, Dec. 22, 1 pm; Monday, Dec. 23, 2 pm; Thursday, Dec. 26, 2 pm; Friday, Dec. 27, 2 pm; Saturday, Dec. 28, 2 pm; Sunday, Dec. 29, 1 pm; \$49-\$199.

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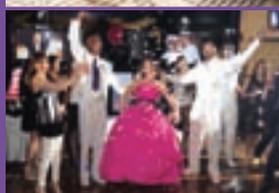
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Till death do us part

Safeguard your children's future with a will

All of my assets are held in joint accounts with my spouse. Do I still need a will? Also, my spouse refuses to go to an estate-planning attorney or to even discuss doing his will. I am really concerned about naming a guardian for my kids and don't want to leave them unprotected. Do I have to wait for him or can I do my documents on my own?

There are two types of assets when it comes to administering an estate, in other words, transferring title to assets. There are “probate” and “non-probate” assets.

Probate assets are transferred by a person appointed by the court as the representative of the estate, who then marshals the assets and distributes them either pursuant to a Last Will and Testament, or, if there is no will, by the law of descent.

Non-probate assets are those that are transferred by operation of law, by presentation of a death certificate. Joint bank accounts, most retirement accounts, and life insurance are non-probate assets if a beneficiary is properly named.

A will is still recommended even if you think that all of your assets are non-probate. First, for parents of children under the age of 18, a will is necessary to nominate a guardian for your children and a trustee to oversee funds left to a child. Absent a will, any assets left to a minor child must be held jointly by any guardian (appointed by the court) and the Clerk of the Court, requiring permission to take any money out. The child also has legal title to the property when he becomes 18, which is not always advisable or desired.

Second, there is almost always an asset that materializes that requires some form of proceeding, either a Social Security check or paycheck issued just prior to death, a car, or just personal property. Third, your



joint or non-probate assets might not be distributed as you intended. Say you have three joint or “In Trust For” accounts, one for each of your children. You fund them with equal amounts, but as time goes on, you draw on those accounts for your living expenses, not always proportionately. At your death, one child might have a balance that is higher than the other. The inequality can spur disputes that can cost more than the proceeds in the accounts.

Clients often avoid executing a will, because it forces them to make difficult decisions they would rather not, while considering their own mortality. However, the failure to make a decision is in itself a decision to defer to the state laws dictating who gets your assets when you die. You might not want your spouse to inherit 50 percent of your assets outright, with your minor children getting the other half.

A will allows you to put certain protections in place, like a testamentary trust, that would protect your assets if your spouse remarries and

ensure that the assets pass to your children. This is especially critical in a second marriage. A will allows you to specify who will inherit and in what proportion.

As for the second question, you are not obligated to wait for your spouse to make a will. There are certain laws about a minimum amount you must leave to a spouse — called a “right of election” — but you can make a will without your spouse's consent or knowledge. If you have a pre-nuptial agreement that gives certain parameters about what you are promising to leave in a will, you should be mindful of that, but it still does not impact your ability to execute a will on your own.

Alison Arden Besunder is the founding attorney of the law firm of Arden Besunder P.C., where she assists new and not-so-new parents with their estate-planning needs. Her firm assists clients in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. You can find Besunder on Twitter @estatetrustplan and on her website at www.besunder-law.com.

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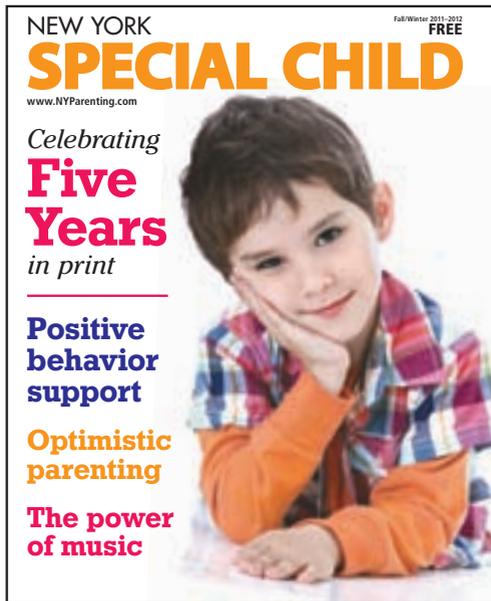
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