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EDITORIAL

Parents must decide best punishments

It's an issue parents struggle with on a regular basis — to spank or not to spank. Some today have decided not to physically strike their children ever — for any reason.

But others believe a hand-delivered swat on the buttocks once in a while doesn't harm a child and firmly sets boundaries every child needs to have in their lives.

Either way, it would be helpful if the laws of the land would give parents some guidance on this controversial issue, so the current challenge to the Canadian Charter of Rights should be helpful.

A Toronto advocacy group — funded by \$45,000 of our tax dollars, by the way — is mounting the challenge, which would make it illegal for parents to hit or spank their children.

They're basing their challenge on the age discrimination aspect of the charter, saying it's just because children are young that they're subjected to physical assaults. Their parents are exempt from assault charges if they're found to have used "reasonable" force in correcting their child. The big question is: what is reasonable? Is reasonable a slap on the hand or buttocks of a two-year-old running into a busy street? Is reasonable using a wooden spoon or belt to discipline a five-year-old or 10-year-old? When does a spanking turn into a beating?

And what about the recent American study which showed that children who were disciplined with physical force exhibited more anti-social behavior later in childhood than children who were disciplined by "time-outs" or withdrawal of privileges?

Ultimately, it's up to every parent to determine how best to discipline their child. But more open discussion and legal clarification on this issue of spanking can only help.



Russians have superstitions galore

Well, I ain't superstitious, but a black cat crossed my trail.

~ Old blues lyric

I've only been cuffed in the head a few times in my life, and most times I was in a situation where I kind of expected (i.e. doing my level best to cuff somebody else in the head) — but I do recall an occasion when a backhand took me by surprise.

I was swabbing decks on an oil tanker somewhere between Halifax and Amuay Bay, Venezuela. I made the mistake of whistling while I swabbed. Next thing I knew I was sprawled face down on

the deck between my bucket and my mop. The Bosun, a red-faced Yorkshireman built like a beer stein, stood over me with his hands on his hips.

"Eejit!" he snarled, "Do ye not know better than t'whistle on a ship?"

As a matter of fact I didn't — but I learned right quick. I discovered that among sailors it's considered perilously bad luck to pucker your lips and blow while you're at sea. They believed, quite seriously, that whistling encouraged the winds to blow.

That wasn't the only superstition those men at sea



Basic Black

Arthur Black

embraced. They believed it was bad luck to change the name of your boat; to name a boat before it was launched; for two relatives to crew on the same vessel and to board a small boat from any direction but the starboard side.

One crewman told me that sailors never molest seagulls, believing them to be the souls of drowned mariners.

They're a superstitious lot, your sailors — but then why not? They've got a risky job, flitting like water spiders over the tossing bosom of a capricious and frequently violent ocean. They need all the good luck they can get.

Strange how most of us, sailor and landlubber alike, still observe many old superstitions. How many of us would deliberately walk under a ladder? Open an umbrella in the house? Not me. Not without tossing a little salt over my shoulder.

Look at weddings. The bride must wear white. On the wedding day, the groom must not see the bride before she comes down the aisle. And when the deed is done we throw handfuls of confetti or rice at them.

Enduring habits, superstitions. I'm not gullible enough to think that handling toads will give me warts, but I cross my fingers before I go in to ask the boss for a raise.

Mind you, when it comes to superstitions, the Russians make you, me and the entire Canadian merchant marine look like a pack of scientific rationalists. Russians are superstitious with a vengeance.

Give birth to a baby in Moscow and your neighbors will tell you not to show it to strangers for 40 days. Bad luck. They also believe it's bad luck to cut the kid's hair

or fingernails for a whole year after birth.

In Russia, it is also bad luck to:

- be born or married in May
- shake hands over a threshold
- give knives or handkerchiefs as gifts
- give anybody a half dozen roses.

Five roses — okay. So is seven. Odd numbers are life-affirming. Even numbers mean death.

Russians aren't all negative, they have good luck omens too. They believe for example, that if you forget something in the house and have to return for it, you can cancel any accruing bad luck by looking into a mirror and smiling. Before setting out on a trip, superstitious Russians sit down for a minute of silence with friends or family.

And my favorite. On Russian buses you'll often see commuters examining their tickets closely. That's because it's considered the greatest luck if your ticket number happens to have the same three numbers at the beginning and at the end. The thing to do if you get one of those tickets is...eat it. That's right. Eat the ticket. On the spot.

Man. It'll be a long time before I'm desperate enough to eat my bus ticket for luck. Touch wood.

Agent exploited teen's naivete

Dear Editor,

We want to draw your attention to an ugly incident that happened this afternoon in our home.

A real estate agent gained unauthorized entry into our residence by exploiting the ignorance and naivete of our teenage son.

This real estate agent misrepresented his calling at our residence.

He lied about someone in our household requesting his service to give the house a look-around as a preliminary to putting our residence on the mar-

ket. We have written a letter complaining of his unprofessional conduct to his home office and we will launch a formal complaint with the Toronto Real Estate Board.

We wish that you will give warning to families in our area.

Most families have two wage earners who are away from home during the day and their residences are left in the care of their grown up (age 13

and beyond) children.

But not all children have learned to be street-smart; these children may have the tendency to yield to smooth talking strangers who come knocking at the door. Unless instructions have been received from their parents, the children should be taught to just tell the strangers to go away and not open the doors to admit them.

Dan Ungshang
Markham

LETTERS

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