

Being a parent calls for sharing as well as caring

There's a woman out in California threatening to start a parent's liberation movement.

Elinor Lenz says society's erected too many barriers between the generations. "Now we need to make new connections," she insists.

Her idea is that parents have to develop new attitudes as their children mature into independent people. "After all, does a 40-year-old man really need someone asking if he used his dental floss that day?" she asks. And must a grown woman be reminded that it's her grandmother's birthday?

Mrs. Lenz's thesis is that the parent-child relationship is based on unequal power. "The parent instructs and controls, and the offspring is expected to react to that," she contends.

"But a friend is not one with superior power. Friendship is based on mutual respect."

Mrs. Lenz told me all this in a recent interview. It must have been a comedown for her, because she had just been interviewed by Jane Pauley for the "Today Show."

She said she'd been told that appearing on that show is like "entering the gates of heaven." She also said Jane Pauley is beautiful and young-looking, face to face.



Shirlee Iden

OUR CHAT was more like two experienced parents comparing notes. No heavenly gates, little glamour. Only she's got a thesis, and I do my parenting by the seat of my pants.

She's said if I don't make a transition soon to being an ex-parent, I'll be clinging to a dead relationship that's a stereotype. She'd like to see me develop a new loving connection with Tsviah, Elaine and Bruce and become an ex-parent.

Becoming an ex-parent would put me on the road to being a friend to my kids. Strange, but I always thought we were friends. At least lately.

We weren't always friends. I can remember wailing that power relationship stuff, all right. When the three rascals were finicky about eating, I'd always say: "I

didn't tell you to like it, I told you to eat it," and I'd say it with a snarl.

One of the kids once told that tale for show and tell, so I stopped doing it. But bedtime was always when Jack and I said it was.

Getting back to Mrs. Lenz, she has two daughters, whom she said are her best friends. "But it took time and struggle to get there." (Somehow, I understood what she meant by that.)

"YOU DON'T become a parent by having a child. There's more to it than biology. And the new role of being a friend to adult children is very important."

What you do is to disconnect yourself from your children. She said you have to listen to yourself and your child objectively.

"It's like divorced people who free each other for new relationships. Parents have to do the same," she said.

"You have to think of your child as someone who is an extension of yourself but who has a right to develop as a separate and unique individual — like a friend."

Mrs. Lenz has done a pile of research on the subject, including some with parents whose children have problems with drugs and cults.

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"If parents can establish the friend relationship at the proper time, a lot of this wouldn't happen," she said.

"Those who join cults often are looking for companionship, for a family."

A longtime writer, who only lately has made a career of it, Mrs. Lenz has put her ideas and the results of research into a book called "Once My Child, Now my Friend" published by Warner Books. It's her third book, and she said it took years to form in her and one year to write.

One of the maxims of the parent's liberation movement that she may start and I may join, will be: "We have to learn to live with our children, not through them."

Take my advice

How to run a campaign

This is the season for political activity in the suburbs.

Voters will soon be hearing a plethora of campaign statements, promises and praises. But the most interesting conversations won't be at the candidates night rallies in school auditoriums.

They will have taken place in the smoke-filled back rooms in the present-day versions of the strategy meetings.

We listened in recently as council candidate Bill Knight got some advice from Joe Swartz, the political pro who has been involved in more campaigns than Harold Stassen and Zolton Perency combined.

Swartz to Knight: "Why do you want to be elected?"

Knight: Well, I'm very qualified. I've been involved in many civic programs in the last few years and I like working with city officials to contribute something positive to the community. I like helping people."

SWARTZ: "Pids you also like the idea of being a local big-shot, right?"

Knight: "Right."

SWARTZ: "Who are the other candidates?"

Knight: "Well, there's 10 candidates for four seats — nine men and one woman."

SWARTZ: "The first thing you got to do is get two more women candidates to split up the women's vote — it doesn't matter who they are, just get a couple of women to file. You better get a Polish candidate in there, too, to draw the Polish votes off, cause I don't think you're going to get them, you being a Protestant. Also make sure there are enough Catholics to go around."

Knight: "The way, I see it, I will run on a platform of honesty, integrity, efficiency, wise expenditure of citizen dollars and my background of civic accomplishment and business expertise."

SWARTZ: "Wrong. That's what everybody says. What are the issues?"

Knight: "Issues? I'm not sure."

SWARTZ: "What you'll do is talk about cutting down on crime in the suburbs before it gets out of hand — even though you won't be able to do anything about it — and you'll be for group homes as long as they are built down by the railroad tracks. It's too early to tell whether you will start attacking the present administration for wasteful, wanton extravagance."

Knight: "But I support the administration. I have the backing of the Mayor."

SWARTZ: "Don't tell anyone. It's not good to be cozy with the present administration until we are sure that they won't do something stupid between now and November. What you do is claim to be an independent thinker and doer who is skeptical of the way city funds are being spent. You'll want to talk about cutting out the fat — conventions and travel expenses, for example."

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overheard over coffee

• A woman political candidate was complaining that her intense campaign was running her ragged. Her companion answered: "Well, Harry Truman said, 'If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.'" The candidate replied: "Heck, that's why I'm running for office. I'm trying to get out of the kitchen."

• "I see where Senator Kennedy (Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.) claims the \$11.8 billion tax cut for the oil industry is a giveaway to the oil companies. But Sen. Dole (Robert Dole, R-Kan.) claimed the cut would help poor and elderly landowners who rely on their meager royalty checks to live. I believe Dole, I mean Big Oil never lied to us before. But, I worry about those elderly people having to sponsor all those television programs."



Bob Wisler

Swartz: "Don't worry, you're not going to cut out their travel, just the travel of department heads, employees and like that. You'll still be able to travel."

Knight: "What else should I talk about?"

SWARTZ: "Nothing. We'll send out a lot of mail and brochures with a lot of photos of you taken in front of the White House and we'll say only enough to make sure they look at the photos."

Now about money. My fee is high. How are you fixed?"

Knight: "I need money."

SWARTZ: "We'll have you a fund-raiser. The ideal fund-raiser is one where everybody kicks in and nobody shows up — keeps expenses down. We'll have a Tuesday morning breakfast at \$100 an egg and figure that nobody will want to come to the place I pick out."

"The way to do this, you see, is invite all the businessmen in town. You got to make them think that you'll do something for them after you're elected without ever really doing anything. At the same time you got to make them think you will probably win so they can't take the chance of crossing you now and paying for it later."

Knight: "That way I keep my integrity, right?"

SWARTZ: "Right."

To whom does it go?

Watch the taxpayer dollar

One of the wonders of our age, or any age for that matter, is the number of people willing to believe what you tell them instead of what you show them. Especially when it comes to money.

Take President Reagan's tax cut. Congress last week OK'd the biggest tax cuts in U.S. history, something like \$750 billion over three years.

Reagan will now move ahead with a plan to cut federal spending by something like \$1 billion.

The cuts are staged — more of them will occur toward the end of the three years than will occur this year — but near as I can figure, this year Reagan will reduce federal income by something like \$200 billion or more while cutting federal spending by about \$35 billion.

MOST OF THE tax cuts will benefit individuals. I heard Reagan on the radio last week railing against the "plains" detractors, calling them "demagogues" because they believed too much of the cuts are aimed at high-income people and not enough of the cuts are aimed at average-income people.

How can this be, Reagan asked, since half of the benefits go to people who make more than \$50,000 and half of the benefits to those who make less? He didn't say it, but it sounded a lot like: What could be more fair?

You already know whether you make more or less than \$50,000. I now invite you to casually speculate on which side of that fence your friends and neighbors fall on.

If by some miracle you're the exact national average household, you'll find that 98 percent of those friends and neighbors make less than \$50,000. Which means half the tax cuts go to two percent of the people.

Reagan, whose California home is on the market at \$1.9 million, lives in a different kind of neighborhood.



Mike Scanlon

But I don't like talking about economics. I like talking about baseball.

THE STRIKE is over and I don't much care whether the owners or the players caused it — although I have an opinion on the subject, considering that the strike was miraculously settled only days before the owner's insurance policy ran out.

What I'm curious about is places like New York, Detroit, Milwaukee and Cleveland, where the stadia are publicly-owned.

The city of Detroit, which got the idea from the city of New York, bought Tiger Stadium for a dollar a few years back.

The price makes Tiger owner John Fetzer sound like a real sweetheart. Steve Kemp knows better.

In exchange for buying the stadium, the city promised to pump millions of dollars into renovation and maintenance. Funds for this came from a public bond sale. The money to pay off the bonds comes from a surcharge on every ticket sold.

That's tickets to baseball games, folks. But for about 50 days this summer, nobody played any baseball games in Tiger Stadium, which means nobody bought any tickets, which means nobody paid any surcharges, which means Detroit didn't have any money coming in to pay off its bonds.

I think they call that breach of contract, as in lawsuit.

Is a robot in your future?



Jackie Klein

After that, Sidney continued, he decided to get an easier job. He became a computer for Bell Telephone Co. His mechanical vocal cords told everyone who dialed information, "The number is listed in your telephone directory."

THAT JOB GOT boring. So Sidney clanked around and found out that doctors were too busy to handle minor illnesses and make house calls and were hiring robots to do the trivial stuff.

"I was hired by a physician and my first patient was a kid who was itching and scratching and breaking out in spots. I told his parents it wasn't measles."

I diagnosed the problem as a case of parental rejection and advanced stages of frozen psyche and neurotic manifestations. The kid's parents threw me out of the house and nearly smashed me to death.

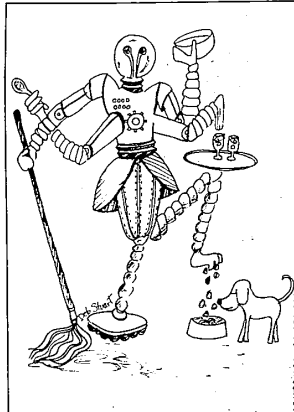
"I had to check into a bump shop for repairs and wait three weeks. They still didn't get all the kinks out — humans are lousy mechanics."

Sidney thought of becoming a robot astronaut. He wanted to be sent to Mars to pick up rocks, smash them in half and hold them up to the TV camera back on earth. He figured that would be cheaper than sending a man into space.

"BUT I guess the government had a surplus of money. I offered to work for less than the minimum wage with no fringes. Maybe I didn't get the job because the astronaut's union kept me out."

"I didn't qualify for unemployment compensation, so I just rattled around for a while. I took a few baby-sitting jobs, but the kids got so violent watching TV they kept bashing my head in."

When Sidney found out a movie studio was casting for "Star Wars," he figured that was his big chance. But when he filled out an application, he got stuck on the question, "Are you male or female?"



That was when Anita Bryant was getting all uptight about homosexuality. So Sidney didn't get the part. To this day, he refuses to serve orange juice.

Things got tougher for Sidney when Ronald Reagan was elected. He couldn't get on ADR (aid to dependent robots). He was refused welfare, food stamps and social security.

Not being among the moral majority, he couldn't even get a defense job. He was turned down by Airborne Warning and Control Systems.

He thought of volunteering to distribute anti-abortion literature but was afraid robots would be considered a subtle form of birth control.

"I'm on my last legs," he sighed. "I guess I'm stuck with doing housework. I'm sick and tired of being abused and discriminated against. I'm forced to be resigned to assuming a submissive, subservient role in life."

You may have a super brain, Sidney. But haven't you ever heard of Robot's Lib?