

The Weekly Log, 3/6/09

by Joe Mulder

Odds are that by the time you read this, my wife and I will have had our second daughter. In the spirit of her arrival, I figured I'd finally put down for posterity my own parenting words of wisdom. These are not tips on parenting technique, mind you; each baby is so different that what works for one doesn't always work for another, and each parent should really find his or her own style.

No, what I've got are practical, "no duh" sort of tips that are more mechanical in nature, and that any new parents should be able to use no matter what kind of baby they get.

You're either going to get a Diaper Genie or a Diaper Champ (unless you're one of those hippie types that wants to believe that cloth diapers will save the Earth, even though they use up as many, if not more, resources); I say get a Diaper Genie. They have a new model that I haven't tried out, so I can't speak to its effectiveness, and the model we've got does have some drawbacks; the mechanism that's supposed to cut the liner that holds the diapers frequently doesn't cut it all the way through, and the first several diapers you put into it are never isolated into their own little cocoons like they're supposed to be. But those are minor inconveniences; a friend of mine had a Diaper Champ, and it looked easy enough to operate, but according to him the smell the thing produced when you needed to empty it out was absolutely ungodly. Such a problem never arises with the Diaper Genie, and that alone is reason enough to recommend it.

Get a bottle tree. Just Google it. It'll save you tons of counter space, and it'll save your sanity. They sell nice wooden ones; spring for one of those.

Get a Bumbo seat. As soon as your kid can hold her head up on her own, the Bumbo seat will become your most indispensable possession. Even if your kid does poop in it literally every time she sits there.

At some point, you might end up using powdered baby formula. You scoop the powder into a bottle and add warm water, and at that point you need to stir it. Nothing, but nothing, is better for that task than the fat end of a chopstick. You're welcome.

This might be the biggest "no duh" tip of all, and even the childless among us can use it. In fact, most people might already be doing it, but I only thought of it a few months ago. When you put a DVD into a DVD player, and you finally get to the menu, don't select "Play" or "Play Movie." Pick "Scene Selection," and go to the first scene. This'll skip you past all the FBI warnings, all the "the opinions expressed on the commentary are not necessarily the opinions of" crap, and, worst of all, any horrific THX ads that might be tacked onto the beginning, and it'll get you right to the start of the movie itself. Again, most people might do this anyway

(anyone who reads this and hasn't been doing it certainly will from now on), but it only occurred to me a little bit ago. After all, as an adult you don't watch five or six DVDs in a day, whereas parents of small children will often start up that many in the course of an afternoon (ten minutes into *Toy Story*, they want *Monsters, Inc.* "Scene Selection," people. Learn to love it.

Finally, and most importantly, introduce your kid to "The Simpsons." If you don't have several seasons of the show on DVD then first of all I feel sorry for you, but second of all you can record the reruns on your DVR; the show is on several times every day (and if you don't have a DVR, well; come on. Get your act together). It really doesn't matter what your kids watch until they're like three, three-and-a-half (apart from explicit sex and graphic violence, I'd imagine), so even the episodes that deal with somewhat mature themes are fine for your kid for the first few years. An enterprising parent could even cull through the episodes and pick out certain ones that are completely G-rated; there are bound to be a few. Your kid will like the funny characters and think it's a show for her, and meanwhile you can watch something that isn't horrible. And if you have never watched children's TV: most of it is horrible. "Sesame Street" is still almost as good as it ever was, and "SpongeBob Squarepants" and "Olivia" are relatively watchable for adults. "Little Einsteins" might be the only other one that's remotely tolerable (and even that's no great shakes); everything else will make you want to swallow hemlock while hitting yourself in the head with a frying pan. Shows for toddlers are *awful*, my friends. Just wretched. I have no idea how shows even get selected to be on the air; I can't imagine what makes a Nickelodeon or Disney exec think "oh, that show is dynamite!" or "no way would a kid watch that!" My daughter watches "Wow Wow Wubbzy," about a blob with a bouncy tail who talks in an annoying voice and does nothing for 22 minutes. Honestly, after an episode, you feel like you've been hooked up to Count Rugen's machine from *The Princess Bride*; that's what an ordeal it is to have to watch this stuff. So give yourself at least one decent option: get your kid hooked on "The Simpsons."

The Golden Globe-winning and Oscar-nominated *In Bruges* sat around at my house for about three weeks before my wife and I finally got around to watching it on Sunday. It was endlessly clever, and I'd recommend it to those who can handle plenty of violence and language.

One thing, though: without spoiling anything, a certain plot contrivance hinges on the inability of Colin Farrell's character to tell the difference between an American and a Canadian. The man in question is played by Zeljko Ivanek, whom Wikipedia tells us moved with his family to America from Slovenia when he was 3. He couldn't possibly sound more American and less Canadian, is the point. Meanwhile, the character of a fat, annoying American tourist is played by

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an obvious Brit doing a relatively bad accent (IMDb.com tells us that the guy is, in fact, a Welshman). What's more, the man is wearing a Yankees cap, but the actor is doing his best to sound like he's from the Midwest. I understand that a Yankees logo is probably the only baseball team insignia that would be recognizable to a European, but feel free to dig a little deeper and have the fat American be from Kansas City, or at least Chicago.

Then, they try to pass off actor Jordan Prentice as an American dwarf; a dwarf he certainly is, but, my instincts honed by watching several seasons of the Vancouver-filmed "X-Files" with my wife (it's her favorite show ever, probably, and we're working our way through the entire series on DVD. She was extremely relieved when we finally reached the seasons that were shot in Los Angeles, because although I enjoy the show too, I was pretty relentless when it came to making fun of the Canadian accents. Particularly when they were supposed to be somewhere like Oklahoma), I picked up on his accent right away. Sure enough; IMDb tells us Jordan Prentice is from Ontario.

What's my point, other than to pad this article out past 1,200 words? Well, my point is that being a fancy-pants British guy like acclaimed playwright and *In Bruges* writer-director Martin McDonagh is well and good, and poking fun at Americans in your movie is well and good, but at least do a little bit of homework. Don't try to pass off an obvious Canadian as a Yankee, and don't try to pass off an obvious American as a Canuck.

Good movie, though.
