

A PIECE OF LAROCQUE

by Tom LaRocque

A little advice on how to raise children...

I'm no expert on parenting, but I think the woman I heard chastising her child in a restaurant recently needs somebody's advice. It might as well be mine, because I know I could vastly improve on the threats she was directing at her young son, Jimmy.

"Jimmy, if you don't stop playing with your food, I'm gonna kill you," she said.

Jimmy went right on dipping his nose into his spaghetti, apparently unmoved by his mother's death threats. You could practically read his devious little mind by looking

into his devious little eyes. "Mom's not gonna kill me," he was thinking. "If she does, I'll be dead."

And right the little tadpole was. A half hour later he was walking out of that restaurant, live as a powerline. He was obviously no longer thinking about his spaghetti, his mother, or his murder, but was premeditating further mischief for when he got home.

I'd bet even money that before he hit the sack that evening, young Jimmy laugh-

ed in the face of death at least a couple more times. Undoubtedly his mother's idle badgering continued to roll right off of him. By the time he hits 18, he will probably have faced more death threats than a Central American bank president.

When serious talk is met with such cavalier disregard, something is wrong. When Jimmy's mom spoke of ending her son's life, she meant well. But if she was to have any hope of getting her son to fly right, clearly she needed more punch in the intimidation

department.

Suppose, for example, she had leaned over and put a fork to the boy's neck. Snarling like John Wayne, she'd say, "Pull your puss out of that grub, Pilgrim, or I'll fill you full of more holes 'n a chain link fence."

If I were a kid in that situation, I'd first say, "Yessir, Mom." Then I'd slowly, carefully back away from that plate of spaghetti. And I'd never, ever think of putting my face anywhere near Italian food again.

Actual violence should never be used against children. It is strenuous and tiresome. But certain disciplinary actions seem far more severe than they actually are, which is the desired effect. Upon the first few occasions of disobedience, for example, hosing down a child with the kitchen sprayer can make him a bit soggy at worst. Thereafter, judicious use of the phrase "Make my day" will go far in deterring untoward behavior.

For adolescents, threats can take the form of withdrawing a carrot, rather than employing a stick. Curtailment of driving privileges can be effective against those who are old enough to drive, and even some who aren't. Here's what I mean:

When your son is about 12,

promise to buy him a brand new Ferarri on his 16th birthday. Loaded with options, tell him. The first time he screws up, renege on the options. Next time he pulls a dumb stunt like painting the dog, talk him down to a less expensive car, like a Porsche. With proper planning you can have him expecting nothing more than a \$200 Chevy before he ever gets behind the wheel.



You should explain to the kids in a clear, calm voice that your objective is not to be cruel. Your goal is to achieve a bit of domestic peace — through whatever means necessary. Get them to understand your position, and make it clear that you empathize with theirs: Say things like, "I was your age once." Then bug your eyes out, give them a crazy half grin, and say, "Think you'll ever be mine?"