

## My resolve is slowly fading

Care to join me?

BY BARB ROSENSTOCK

**W**hen I first gazed into my baby's eyes, completely whacked out on after-birth hormones, I vowed to raise our child absolutely flawlessly. Since someone had made the serious mistake of entrusting my husband and me with an actual human infant, it was mandatory that we achieve parental perfection, and quickly.

If memory serves (and mine has recently gone on a long lunch break) here's the list of those parenting resolutions created in January, just after the birth of our first child:

1. No crying. Carry child with you always.
2. No germs allowed.
3. My child's sleep should never, ever be disturbed.
4. Only natural fibers will touch my baby's skin.
5. I will never raise my voice to my child.
6. No play guns or weapons, in my house or others'.
7. Every moment must be filled with educational opportunity.
8. No TV. Ever.
9. No junk food. Ever.
10. I resolve to be (and be married to) the perfect parent.

In that "year of being pregnant," I had memorized the entire bibliography of Dr. Sears, Dr. Weissbluth and all the other doctors at the American Academy of Pediatrics. I already knew *What to Expect the First Year*. I studied *Child, Parent, American Baby* and *Family Fun* like they were the *Princeton Review*. I thought that nine months of a swollen belly, sore feet that I couldn't see and mood swings that were the envy of both *Jekyll and Hyde* prepared me for raising a child.

Despite the chuckles (OK, loud, uncontrollable laughter) coming from the vicinity of my mom, mom-in-law and friends with children, I came down from New Motherhood Mountain with my parenting resolutions written in stone. Sadly, when faced with a small, screaming human (and a larger, screaming headache) those etched-in-stone resolutions turned to baby powder faster than you can say "Look, Teletubbies are on."

My first parenting resolutions were a tad ambitious considering they didn't take into account our son's personality, my spouse, our families, our friends, the larger culture or any other such minor concerns. In other words, they were all about how others viewed ME! (You remember, that person you used to be before grown people started calling you "Jimmy's mommy.") The consequences of living up to this first list during a short bout of postpartum depression and daily living with a growing child were both immediate and serious:

- Chemical dependency in the form of intravenous

*Barb Rosenstock lives in the northwest suburbs with her camera-shy husband, Marc; two sons, Danny and Jeff; and Abby the poodle. Her grown stepdaughter, Jessica, has recently escaped to Milwaukee.*



Barb Rosenstock with her sons.

coffee drips, Prozac and an odd addiction to Kraft Macaroni & Cheese.

- A complete loss of the self I used to be.
- AND a more realistic patience with self, spouse and the child.

Once the second child was on the way, I knew parenting required continual adjustment or the alternative of death from self-imposed stress (even I knew this was bad).

Here's the list of January resolutions adjusted for Child No. 2:

1. Some crying teaches patience. "Uppy. Schmuppy. I have groceries to buy."
2. Germs are necessary for building a strong immune system. "Wipe your hands on your pants and stop whining."
3. Sleeping too much now may teach children that when they are parents they will be allowed sleep. This is false.
4. Buy clothing that survives outdoor play. Look for the organic Teflon label.
5. Yelling sometimes works. But don't make a fool of

Photo courtesy of Barb Rosenstock

yourself. In public.

6. If a child must create a gun out of a friend's naked Barbie, don't pretend to shoot Grandma. Dead. Often.
7. When an educational opportunity presents itself, don't ignore it ... unless you're just too frazzled and will jump out the car window if another young person asks you a curious, but completely inane question.
8. TV is sometimes useful to calm and soothe. You are getting sleepy ... very sleepy.
9. Fries ARE a vegetable. Is a potato not a vegetable?
10. Leave your spouse alone (he doesn't know what he's doing either) and try not to let everyone see that sometimes you're not even a good parent.

In the years since that last list, I've given up on even pretending I have child-raising answers. I tend to seek out and listen to realistic parents and ignore those pesky my-kid-slept-through-the-night-at-2-days-old-has-an-IQ-of-210-was-asked-to-try-out-for-a-major-league-team-cooks-her-own-100-percent-organic-break-fast-kind-of-parents that drive me up the wall (and some days, over the cliff). Honestly, despite my resolutions, since one of my child's first words was "gun," do I really need to know your child's first word was "relativity"?

My only serious wish is that more parents would resolve to be more honest, less competitive friends to other parents. (Makes world peace look doable, doesn't it?)

This year, in that gentler spirit of cooperation, all parents probably need only the shortest possible list of 2006 parenting resolutions:

1. Keep the kid alive.
2. Do your best.

Oh yeah, and have a happy new year. You've earned it. ☺