

Columnists

The Baird Facts: Lollipops stick it to moms

By Esther C. Baird

Sun Jun 21, 2009, 06:29 PM EDT

BEVERLY, MASS. –

Stop giving my children lollipops.

You know who you are. You, the retail owners and managers and employees of America, or to keep the scope within reason, of the North Shore. Yes you. Stop it.

There is a time and place for a child to have a lollipop and it is almost never when they are running errands with me in your store. I mean, of course, unless *you* want to wrestle them into their car seats with all the buckles and straps while they wave their gooey lollipop in and out of your hair. Or unless *you* want to wipe down every surface they touch over the 30 unbelievably slow minutes it takes my girls to consume a lollipop one sticky lick at a time. And certainly, by all means, if *you* plan to come over and babysit them when the lollipop hits their system and ruins their lunch and nap, then great, give them a lollipop. Go for it.

Listen, I don't have pure ice in my veins. I exclude shot-day at the doctor. I'm well aware that if ever there was a reason to mix a young child with a lollipop it is after being stuck with a needle. But not for a well-health check-up! Certainly not. I've taken to announcing early on at regular doctor's visits, "If my daughter is good today she can pick a sticker!" and our doctor gets the hint. Stickers are wonderful because the only thing sticky . . . is the sticker. Not hair or car seats or faces or cabinets or floors or toys.

Unfortunately, the norm is a lollipop at every turn. It always begins when you, the retail vendor, go into that child-winning, sing-songy voice:

"Mom, can these beautiful girls have a lollipop?"

"Mom, do these little girls need lollipops?"

"Hi girls, ask your Mommy if you can have a lollipop"

"Who wants a lollipop, girls? Oh, Mom?"

Don't "Mom?" me. Honestly! By mentioning the word lollipop out loud, by voicing it in the space time continuum where I am standing with my girls, there is no recourse. You and I both know that the deed is done. You are relying on the fact that I will not deny my girls, in a public place, the beloved childhood freebie lollipop.

You know, I will grit my teeth and reply back in an equally sing-songy voice:

"Ooooh, girls, lollipops! What do we say to the man/lady/waiter/nurse/banker/security guard/flight attendant/grocery bagger/postal clerk/town hall records keeper/Sunday school teacher/camp counselor?"

And we'll all sing, "Thank you," together.

But you should know that what I really mean is, "I hope you sit on a melted lollipop in your car while a swarm of bees flies in your window!"

But then, glistening like a beacon of sugar-free hope, there is RWJ's, the wine store attached to B.J.'s in Peabody. After a mega-shop where we bulked up on all things bulky, we hit their wine store for a quick grab of our favorite labels. The girls were quiet and well behaved and we pulled up to the checkout without much fuss.

The cashier, a young guy, looked at my girls and leaned in toward me. "Hey I'm going to whisper this really fast so they can't hear."

I hunched in. Was it some wine secret that was inappropriate to young ears?

"I have lollipops here, but I don't want to offer them to your children unless you want me to. Would they like some?"

I froze. It was a genetically perfect cashier. Was this for real? Was I on hidden camera? I came to my senses.

"No! No, they would not like one! I mean, yes, they would, but don't ask them!" I was stunned.

He smiled and nodded. "Yeah, I figured that might be the case."

He was so young — I couldn't figure it out. "Do you have children of your own?" I asked, confused.

He recoiled and stared at me like maybe I'd been sampling the wares in the back of the store.

"No!" He shuddered. "No way! I'm just in college."

I laughed, I was so, sooo, old to him. But for his part, he was so, sooo insightful. I said as much.

"Yeah, well, it's just I know if, and it's a BIG if, I ever had kids I'd want someone to ask me before they were given lollipops."

Exactly!! Leave it to the college dude with no kids to get it.

But you won't stop. I'll keep cleaning up sticky spots. My girls will keep looking at each clerk they see with hope anew. And you and I will keep up our sing-songy little charade.

But know that I'm secretly listening for bees.

Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact her with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at: www.estherbaird.com.