

## Columnists

### **The Baird Facts: Potty training, take two**

By Esther C. Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

I last wrote about potty training in August 2006. It was a whimsical piece about my first daughter. I joked about rewarding with blueberries versus M&Ms, and commented on the cleanliness of various Beverly restrooms. It was breezy because my first daughter is a child who loves structure. She did at age 2 and she still does at age 5. She grasped immediately the beauty of consequences. If she used a potty, she got M&Ms. It was easy, rewarding, obvious.

And now, three years later, it's time to potty train our second daughter. What could be easier I thought? The path had already been trod, the system was perfected, the structure was in place. The child, however, is different. Our second daughter sees structure and dismantles it, joyfully, into little shreds of happy chaos that better suit her personality.

Bribery was needed – and how. This time, I knew to skip immediately to M&Ms .

"You'll get two M&Ms every time you go pee-pee!" I said in a big, excited voice.

My older daughter added, "And you get five if you go . . ."

"Three! Not five!" I interrupted with a hiss.

My youngest daughter smiled widely. "Five!"

Fine. Five. Whatever. I'll make you an M&M waffle if you want. I assumed, given how much my youngest daughter loved candy, that this would simply accelerate the process. So it was almost inconceivable to us when her resistance to The Potty Plan included a refusal to be swayed by M&Ms.

"Don't you want some M&Ms sweetie?"

"Sure. Can I have some?" She'd ask with an impish smile.

"Yes! Mommy will give you buckets if you will go on the big girl potty. Do you want to try?"

"No. I don't want to. I want to go potty in my diaper." And off she'd skip.

I wondered if she was scared to actually sit on the potty. So I offered to read a story to her while she was on it so she could relax. She agreed, and into the bathroom we went. I took along, "I Ain't Gonna Paint No More," by Karen Beaumont, a story meant to be sung to the tune of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" (or, 99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall . . . whatever, parents choice, I say).

I began to sing.

"I ain't gonna paint no more, no more, I ain't gonna paint no more, that's what I say, but there ain't no way, I ain't gonna paint no more."

She nodded at me as if I was the one who needed encouragement.

"Keep singing, Mommy!"

I took a deep breath. "Soooo, I take some red and I paint my . . ."

". . . head!" She sang, sitting calmly on the potty.

I nodded, beaming. "Oh I ain't gonna paint no more. But what's the harm if I paint my . . .?"

". . . arm!" She squealed and kicked her feet happily from her porcelain perch.

I smiled and kept on singing.

"But I just can't stand not to paint my . . .?"

" . . . hand!" She yelled with gusto.

And I kept singing. And singing. Until the book came to its colorful end.

"Again! Sing it again!" She yelled with force and festivity. It was a regular party, but as long as she was happy to sit on the potty, I was happy to sing. I was sure potty magic would occur. And so I sang. "Again!" and "Again!" and "Again!"

Forty-five minutes later we emerged from the bathroom. Not a drop of pee-pee had been released. I was hoarse and frazzled and I wanted to hunt down Karen Beaumont. And what is most remarkable is that the next day, our 2-year-old, carefree, diaper-loving ball of glee got my husband to do the same thing. For another 45 minutes. With the same, bone-dry results.

You know how they define craziness . . .

My Aunt, who witnessed some of the bathroom shenanigans, pulled me aside.

"Esther, you know there comes a point when potty training becomes a control issue."

"I know!" I said with exasperation. "I know she can do it and can control it, but she just won't!"

My aunt leaned in. "I meant that perhaps you have the control issue."

Well.

Perhaps that was a possibility.

So I've let it go for now. My daughter is as happy as ever and I'm fairly content to not be sitting on a bathmat singing. Plus we have plenty of M&Ms around now for snacks.

*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](mailto:esther@estherbaird.com), or visit her Web site at: [www.estherbaird.com](http://www.estherbaird.com).*