

# LETTERS

## Who determines what's best?

To the Editor:

[Re recent ARRI editorial on Bittersweet Farms, and rural living for autistic adults]:

Both my parents grew up on farms, but moved to town. It was the right decision for all of us in those hard times. Nonetheless, they valued their country upbringing so much that summer Sunday afternoons when we were young were spent at my grandmother's farm. When I think of my childhood the only vivid memories I have are of the times spent there—picking wild strawberries...smelling the already cut hay...hearing the sound of seagulls and other birds.

It has only now dawned on me why my own memories are so vivid. They all involved the senses—tastes, smells, sounds, sights, touch—and feelings. Maybe that's why nature seems so important to my autistic son Russ. Nature requires no language and he can communicate with it through his senses. It is his natural environment. It gives him great joy.

In all his life of suburban and urban living, I have never seen him make a real connection with anyone who was not paid to be in his life or was not family. If not human connections, then what does "community" life have to offer him that farm life doesn't? Noise, confusion, danger, crowds, restrictions? What a price he and many others have to pay to live in an environment that has so little to offer them!

For ten years I've approached people to try to get a "Bittersweet West" started. I've been met with everything from shock to disdain. I've been told that what I want is nothing but a mini-institution or funny-farm, that I mustn't hide him away, that I mustn't isolate him. My grandparents would have been shocked to hear their lifestyle described in those terms, with the inference being that they were not part of a community.

Who are the "theys" who determine what's best for my son? Why do "they" think our children all came from the same mold with the same needs? And what matters most—the quality of my son's life, or current philosophy?

Mary Holliday  
Aurora, CO

*Editor's note: Beautifully put! We are often asked for information about farm-type residences, like Bittersweet Farms, for autistic adults. If you know of any such places, now in existence or in the planning stages, please tell us about them. We are compiling a list of such facilities.*

*The ARRI has two books for sale on this topic, both edited by Jane and Norman Giddan, at \$19.00 postpaid (CA residents add 7% sales tax):*

**Autistic Adults at Bittersweet Farms**  
(211 pages, paperback)

**European Farm Communities for Autism**  
(159 pages, paperback).

## B6 for hyperactivity

To the Editor:

Although my child with Asperger's syndrome is making progress [with vitamin B6/magnesium therapy], the most remarkable difference was with my daughter [who has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder]! She and I have fought like cats and dogs for eons—she has a very rebellious nature and a most difficult temperament. I immediately (the very next day) saw a change in her personality...she has been more cooperative, less argumentative, eager to help, very pleasant, more affectionate, happier, etc. It would be difficult to describe all the changes we have noticed in her...

A Georgia mother

*Editor's note: In 1979, Mary Coleman published an article in Biological Psychiatry on a controlled, double-blind study—using children already known to respond to Ritalin—which compared the effectiveness of Ritalin and vitamin B6 in controlling hyperactivity. Her finding: B6 was just as effective as Ritalin. (In addition, of course, B6 is much safer than Ritalin.) Yet, as far as I know, not one researcher has taken the trouble to repeat this study to see if Coleman's findings can be confirmed.*

## Help wanted/advice offered

To the Editor:

Male hormones can affect a female fetus by "masculinizing" cognition—as in congenital adrenal hyperphasia (CAH). I am interested in contacting any CAH or similar woman with an autistic child.

Berthajane Vandegrift  
608 Sartori Drive  
Petaluma, CA 94954

To the Editor:

I have begun using a homeopathic remedy with my 10-year-old autistic son. Although manufactured for insomnia, stress and anxiety in the general public, this product has helped him to be much more flexible, patient, social and calm. After our success, I introduced over 20 other families to this product. Over 90% of them report that their autistic, Down's syndrome, ADHD and non-disabled children demonstrate an easier time falling asleep and staying asleep. In addition, they seem more calm, focused, social, flexible, and less impulsive.

The product is safe, natural, nontoxic and non-addictive. It is perhaps a safer alternative to melatonin. Interested families may contact me for more information.

Heidi Wagner  
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Minnetonka, MN 55345  
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*Editor's Note: This is an extremely interesting possibility. Please write to ARRI if you try it. Tell us if it works for you—and also tell us if it doesn't work!*

*Letters to the Editor are welcomed. Letters intended for publication must be signed and should not exceed one page in length, including references. Letters may be edited without consulting the authors.*

# Vaccinations

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James Gale et al., whose research appeared in *JAMA* in 1994, conducted a population-based, case-controlled study of 1,237 children between one and 24 months old, and reported that "the risk of developing a neurological illness [within seven days of immunization] was not significantly higher than average among the children who received the DPT vaccine." They noted, however, that "the risk of developing encephalopathy or complicated seizures was somewhat higher than expected."

Other research has linked vaccinations to rheumatoid arthritis. One trial of the rubella vaccine found that 41% of women who were vaccinated developed joint pain, nine percent developed transient arthritis, and five percent developed persistent arthritis.

Proponents of vaccination argue, however, that adverse reactions to vaccines have been blown out of proportion, and that without widespread immunization, diseases such as polio and pertussis will make a comeback. They cite recent outbreaks, one of measles and one of whooping cough, at private California private schools which do not require immunization. A recent *British Medical Journal* article also notes that an epidemic of whooping cough which occurred from 1977 to 1979, after a decline in vaccinations for the disease, "was the biggest for over 20 years."

Vaccination critics counter that long-term research into the effects of vaccinations is lacking; that substances contained in vaccines (including mercury and formaldehyde) are known toxins; and that by vaccinating a large percentage of the population, doctors are reducing the development of natural immunity to pathogens.

While the two sides in this dispute disagree on many things, most individuals on both sides agree that more long-term studies are needed to weigh the benefits of vaccinations versus the risks, and to determine whether or not the current U.S. trend of vaccinating children at increasingly early ages is wise.

*Editor's Note: See page 6 for additional information.*

"Adverse events associated with childhood vaccines other than pertussis and rubella: summary of a report from the Institute of Medicine," Kathleen Stratton, Cynthia Johnson Howe, and Richard Johnston, Jr.; *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 271, No. 20, May 25, 1994, pp. 1602-1605. Address not listed.

"Risk of serious acute neurological illness after immunization with diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine: a population-based case-control study," James Gale, Purushottam Thapa, Steven Wasilak, Janet Kay Bobo, Paul Mandelman, and Hjordis Foy; *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 271, No. 1, January 5, 1994, pp. 37-41. Address not listed.

DPT: A Shot in the Dark, Harris Coulter, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985.

"Can immunization trigger rheumatoid arthritis?" D.P.M. Symmons and K. Chakravarty, *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, Vol. 52, No. 12, 1993, pp. 843-845. Address not listed.

"Immunization," Norman Begg and Angus Nicoll, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 309, No. 961, 1994, pp. 1073-1075. Address not listed.