

Monitor

Time Out Kids' monthly report card on what we like, and what we could live without.

Gold star!

Night lights get an artsy, personal twist thanks to the enlightening company **LightAffection**. Their website (lightaffection.com) turns your family's favorite photos into illuminated raised-relief sculptures, shipped to you within days. Why limit images of your loved ones to just two dimensions?

It's fashionable these days to mock the outsourcing of traditional parenting tasks, and generally we agree, with the exception of **sleep specialist/miracle worker Lisa Spiegel**. She's changed lives after just one session.

Grounded!

The federal government has announced an allocation of \$1.6 million in grants for **random student drug testing**. But the screening can be done only on students who participate in athletics and other extracurricular activities. Yearbook clubs around the country should start cleaning up their acts.

The *Daily News* says NYC parents should be worried about their child's school bus operator. The paper reports that 14 complaints of physical abuse in 2006, confirmed by the Dept. of Education, involved **assaults on kids by drivers or bus monitors**.

Out take

Stop using your children to advertise your family's upscale vacations. By **David Slavin**



Let's face it: We live in a branded world. Ads are slapped onto everything, from *Desperate Housewives* dry-cleaning bags to eggs that tout CBS's prime-time lineup on their shells. I'm sorry, but there's something way beyond wrong about that.

But another phenomenon is taking place that's just as insidious: parents who, via their children, market their high-end lifestyle for all of us to see. I'm talking about little boys wearing those oversize ski-lift tickets on the zippers of their down jackets, bronzed little girls sporting Turks & Caicos caps, and kids of all ages carrying enough worldwide-destination gear to make Mr. Frommer look like a couch potato. Think of it as an unspoken declaration among New York parents: "I've been somewhere, and you haven't."

Whether they're from Alta or Anguilla, Gstaad or St. Maarten, parents use their kids as tiny

billboards to make the rest of us feel like penniless slackers?

I say it's time to embrace the fact that you were too poor, too pooped or too disorganized to get your act together and make a reservation before the one-way airfare to Orlando hit \$900. Let those snow bunnies and sun gods know that you spent Christmas, Easter and Memorial Day weekend in the greatest city in the

What little girl wouldn't want a real Gray's Papaya hairnet?

world. Here are some suggestions to help you wear your poverty (or procrastination) with pride.

—*Put these suggestions to rest.*

slice of Ray's pizza on a chain around your youngster's neck; it positively screams New York, kids never get tired of it, and you won't have to leave the playground if they get hungry.

Other people's children wear T-shirts announcing that they've been everywhere from Grand Cayman to the Grand Canyon. Yawn. True junior New Yorkers can trumpet their civic pride by wearing only Big Apple-centric merchandise. This season's favorites: the *I SURVIVED BACK-TO-BACK BIRTHDAY PARTIES AT CHELSEA PIERS TEE*, the *MORNING, AFTERNOON AND NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM GIESIE* and the *I WENT TO DUANE READE AND ALL I GOT WAS A BOATLOAD OF ATTITUDE* hoodie.

What little girl wouldn't want a real Gray's Papaya hairnet, once worn by the sauerkraut guy himself? Pair it with a papaya drink, and you'll have one happy, gastrointestinally

SOHO PARENTING, Director - Lisa Spiegel

family took New Jersey Transit for a day trip to Weehawken. But must their parents use kids as tiny

Terror at Disney World? That's nothing: I rode the 5 train to Bowling Green—during rush hour! Or hang a

New York Times and the *Los Angeles Times* and on *National Public Radio's "All Things Considered."*

A conversation with...

Denise Brodey, editor of *The Elephant in the Playroom*, an anthology of essays by parents of kids with special needs.

Brodey's book was inspired by her eight-year-old son, Toby, who has been diagnosed with sensory integration dysfunction—extreme sensitivity to light, noise, sound and touch—and childhood depression. The editor-in-chief of *Fitness* magazine, Brodey lives with her family in Park Slope.

Your book's title refers to the culture of silence surrounding families with special-needs kids. What isn't being addressed?

There's a lot of talk among parents and in the media about facts and statistics, but there isn't a discussion of what really happens in your home—the tough things that you have to deal with, and how it's okay to be completely frazzled. There's so much power in letting other people know what you're going through, and the book is about starting the conversation. Each chapter is filled with things that parents don't talk about—how to choose a school, what to do about grandparents, how to take care of yourself.

Do you deal with different issues in the city than you would in the suburbs?

People here are definitely in your face, and it's noisy, and you're not in the space bubble of a car like you would be in the suburbs. We've had situations where I've thought, "This is so overwhelming for him," where he was exhausted at the end of the day, just from coming off the subway and having people and noise all around him. But as a woman

in the book says, when my kid grows up, he isn't going to be able to go to a special-needs grocery store. He'll need to be able to handle those things.

Toby has a ten-year-old sister. How has she been affected by all the attention he requires?

Emily is just your average kid—she's bright and curious and scared of things she's supposed to be scared of. We've spent a lot of time thinking about how not to let Toby suck all the energy and fun and time out of the day. I don't think we're always 100 percent successful, but we've become a tighter-knit family. **You and many of the essayists in the book use variations on the word quirky to describe your children. Why is that?**

If you need to present something to your insurance company, you need a label: What are we treating? But in the end, you don't look at your kid like he has a big sign on his forehead saying, "I have autism." He's just wacky, and you start to appreciate the wackiness.

—*Carolyn Juris*

