

Nightmare on Checkout street

by Lisa McKimm



As I watched a struggling Mother at the supermarket checkout this morning - it took me back. Back to the grocery shopping days when I struggled to handle the fact that I had once again forgotten the shopping list at home and also had to cope with young inquiring minds in vocal bodies.

I suddenly worried that the parent I was observing had no idea of my flashbacks, and may believe that I might be having disapproving thoughts about the way that she was handling things. To reassure her, I called out smilingly 'Boy, that takes me back to my own kids!' She returned the smile weakly. I knew that feeling too. As she struggled to find her Eftpos card and keep the baby from falling out of the trolley seat, she also did her best to be deaf to the tears and demands for chocolate from her three year old. 'Can I watch your baby for you?' I asked. She gratefully accepted, then afterwards sped off homeward, probably for Paracetamol.

I remember taking my eldest to get groceries when he was about two and a half. He had started to drool as we entered the checkout. 'Choclick?' he asked. 'No - no chocolate today' I firmly replied....'I said no chocolate' - but he was reaching for it, as it gleamed at the back of the counter. Then suddenly, with determination and dexterity - he'd done it! The Nestle holy grail was in his hand. 'Put it back please' I said, transporting other items from the trolley to the conveyor belt at high speed. 'I mean it - put it back'. My voice was becoming lower and slightly menacing. Put . . .it. . . . back.

His eyes were firmly transfixed on mine. I suspect he was looking for a sign of weakening will. He held firmly to the chocolate and slowly started to move the wrapped bar towards his mouth. 'Don't you dare' I warned.

Probably that was about the moment that my rationale deserted me. I was about to paint myself into a corner big time. 'Don't put that into your mouth or Mummy will have to pay for it!' Oh duh!! In a lightning flash he saw the opportunity that had just been presented. And a jiffy later, the chocolate bar was jammed between his teeth where indelible toothmarks of ownership were being made. I couldn't believe it. I took a deep breath. 'Now I will have to pay for it - put it on the counter please'.

He did so, his eyes filled with a chocolaty gleam (a look normally the reserve of pre-menstrual women). I asked the checkout lady if she could keep the chocolate out for us. He radiated a sense of triumph.

Bags all packed and groceries paid for - I picked up the source of my sons attentions. I wheeled straight in the direction of the nearest rubbish bin, and explained gently - 'We don't get chocolate like that' and just like that - it was gone. My son was stunned. So was I. I had no idea that a chocoholic like myself was capable of such feats of self control.

Tough you think? Sometimes people ask me 'Why didn't you just take it home and eat it yourself, or save it until you thought he deserved a treat?' For me, either of these would have failed to teach the lesson about behaviour that was not okay at the supermarket. He didn't ever try the same tactic again.

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This story raises two points. Firstly, never give in after ten minutes of being worn down by your kids. Otherwise, they will have just learnt a lesson that they will put into constant use. i.e. It only takes ten minutes of persistence to get your own way. Do Not paint yourself into that corner, as you may spend a long time regretting it.

Secondly, next time you see a parent struggling in the supermarket - show some understanding. No matter who you are or what your age is - perform a little act of kindness.

A reassuring or empathetic word.

An offer of help.

Even if it is turned down, you will still leave that parent feeling the gift of support.

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