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**MY FATHER,
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**An Extraordinary
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**OUR TOP TEN
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UNSAFE X-RAYS

By Ralph Nader





Once there was only one Spock baby in the world. Now there are millions—but this was the first: Dr. Benjamin Spock's son, Michael, with his famous daddy at age 1.

MY FATHER, DOCTOR SPOCK



Michael, now 25, is married, the father of three Spock babies and director of the Boston Children's Museum.

Dr. Benjamin Spock is the godfather of a generation. No man since Freud has so changed the world's thinking about the early years of life. Only the Bible and Shakespeare have been more widely read than Dr. Spock; but he has been both bible and bard to 19 million parents around the globe.

Now he has shaken the world again. At 64, he is the white-haired father figure of the protest movement against the Vietnam war and faces criminal charges of inciting youths to defy the draft. Throughout this extraordinary life, Dr. Spock has seemed more a symbol than a man, more an authority than a human father—except, of course, to his own children. In this interview with the Journal's Diana Lurie, the doctor's first-born son, Michael—who was the

original Spock baby—draws an unforgettable intimate portrait of his father, his own late and tear-filled childhood; his successful nine-year psychoanalysis; and his feelings about Dr. Spock today.

□ "My father drives himself very hard—even to the point of answering every bit of his mail. He is a product of his own upbringing. My grandmother, who died last January, was even more resolute in her convictions. Because she had a stroke five years ago, I doubt she was aware of Ben's political actions. Yet whatever stand she would have taken about it, there would have been no middle ground."

□ "As a parent I agree with my father that you have to establish limits. Children (continued)

want discipline, and they want to know boundaries. Discipline was not applied by spanking when I was growing up. Ben always dealt in absolutes. Something was either right or wrong. Having communicated those limits to me, I'd know the areas in which I could operate. The limits? Don't be disruptive, don't butt in, don't be slow dressing, don't forget to write thank-you notes to Grandma. People who knew me as a child tell me I got away with murder. I don't ever remember getting away with murder. I could always feel Ben's strong sense of disapproval if I did something wrong, and I wouldn't think of attempting to talk him out of a decision or try to get round him."

"I never kissed my father"

"I can give you some examples of the way we treat our own kids and the way I can't imagine my behaving when I was a boy. My kids are free with physical affection. We kiss good-night and when we say good-bye. My father enjoys this with them too, because they are spontaneous with him. I never kissed my father."

"If my parents had company and I wished to mix, I was expected to enter conversation. It never occurred to me to act any other way. I enjoyed passing the peanuts and talking about school, but I wasn't playful. Our kids act less like adults. Nor do we insist they sit throughout the entire dinner, but can be excused when through. I never was. It's a difference in flexibility. My father may say we don't set enough limits or follow them. I think both my wife Judy and I have a lot to learn, but we're doing a pretty good job."

"I try to get out of answering how my upbringing was different from other children's by saying I was grown up by the time Ben wrote *The Book*. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Spock wrote *The Book—The Common-Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*—from 1943 to 1945. Michael was 10 years old when his father began work on it; 13 when it was published.]

"When I was born, 35 years ago, my father was just starting out in practice in New York City. In second grade I was transferred to the Fieldston School, part of the ethical culture system. I was sent there because of its remedial reading program. I read from right to left instead of left to right—to me the word 'saw' looked like 'was' and 'was' looked like 'saw'."

"The dramas of New York living—parties, activities, everything—made me once complain to my parents that they went out more than the King and Queen of England. They replied the King and Queen of England didn't go out much. My father, who was always available to the mothers of his patients, worked incredibly long hours. He'd come home at 7 o'clock to a supper which had been waiting half an hour. Then phone calls started and he was forever on the telephone with mothers. My mother wanted him to be firmer with them, but he never was."

"When father was available I had as much contact with him as anyone. Times of intimacy and companionship were mainly in the morning and in the bathroom. We'd get up about seven. I'd sit in the bathtub while he'd shave and help me with my multiplication tables

or tell me about a movie he'd seen."

"To stop my dawdling he devoted a race against me over a period of months. When I beat him he bought me a silver-plated loving cup with my name on it, which years later turned black and peeled."

"A fuss was made over losing a tooth. If I discovered a loose one, I'd make it really wiggly before going to my father to help me pull it out. It never hurt because he did it quickly. He didn't pull, but gently punched it and poked it out with his thumb. Later when I was asleep with it under the pillow, he'd slip in a quarter. I never thought there was a tooth fairy any more than I thought there was a Santa Claus. My parents were very generous at Christmas. My father loved to shop, and we'd go together for Mother's presents. When we found it in the lingerie departments I found it embarrassing, but father, with complete assurance, took a long time selecting nightgowns."

"My father never stated how he thought the world should be. Nor did he ever explain right from wrong. We never went to church or had religious instruction. My father doesn't believe in moral absolutes handed down from above. He holds that unless human beings behave within limits and live up to their beliefs they will be uncomfortable. Our spiritual strength came from a sense of convictions and not from a set of rules you can write down. We were brought up on an attitude which we try to ingrain in our own children. It is that people are worth paying attention to."

A circus without the band

"It's coincidental that I became director of the Boston Children's Museum. It just happened to be the most interesting job open. How does a museum like this fit into the beliefs my father holds important? It's damned hard to bring current world problems into a museum. Our primary focus is to say that there are things going on around you which you may not be able to label but are worth paying attention to. I want a kid to leave this place feeling more self-assured and understanding more. Museums often represent dead circuses to kids—all the life has been sucked out of them. Who likes going to a circus without the band; the crack of a whip, the smell of a menagerie? We want to make the exhibits live again."

"My adolescence, the black phase of my life, lasted 15 years. I started college at Antioch in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in the fall of 1939. I had a hard time settling down to work, switched courses, did well in some subjects, but found it exasperating to do a paper. I'd sit in front of a typewriter for three days and not move. Nowadays, they talk about an identity crisis. Then, all I knew was that I was having a time keeping up. My problem was: 'Who is Michael Spock?'"

"At spring vacation I told my parents about the severe studying problem. They suggested a counselor or psychiatrist. My mother was convinced it was important. Initially, despite his sophisticated psychoanalytical training, my father felt it was a matter of my willpower—that I wasn't buckling down to study. Nevertheless, they looked for help, and discovered a psychiatrist at the University of Cincinnati. He said to me, 'Let's start talking.' I thought we'd

only discuss my studying trouble, but by age 18 I was in full-scale psychoanalysis, which lasted nine years."

"Three times a week I'd take the four-hour round-trip ride from Antioch to Cincinnati. I hitchhiked the first year, before buying a succession of old used cars. At the end of my analysis, I figure I'd driven 100,000 miles."

"It was hard for my family, especially since I had been successful in grade and high schools. I did stutter a bit—still do occasionally—but never had appeared to be a troubled child. It was only when I left the family structure that everything seemed to disintegrate. It takes a long time to wean yourself."

"My father paid for all the analytic sessions and, of course, I depended on him. I left before I was really finished. Everybody does. I don't think anybody comes to a complete wind-up—to a point when they can't see a ribbon on the thing. During it, all I dropped out of Antioch three times to take a variety of jobs: a hospital orderly, a gas-station attendant, a cabinetmaker, a copy boy in a Dayton store's advertising department. My parents were distressed; and my wife Judy, an art student whom I had met at Antioch and married in 1955, felt I would never settle down. Nine years after I started college, I graduated with a degree in biology."

"How my children regard me is secondary to how they feel about themselves. I would like them to be aware of themselves and at ease in themselves. I hope they feel the sort of contentment I do today. I hope they find a life for themselves that gives them a degree of gratification I now have from mine."

Like father, like son?

"Judy feels a bit on the spot about raising Dr. Spock's three grandchildren. She's very sensible, but a strong component tells her to look out. People find it fascinating that we are bringing up kids, and they do give a damn about the way we treat them. We aren't aware that they wonder whether we spank our kids and whether we experience other parent's problems. Unless you like being an actor on a stage, this outside concern isn't enjoyable."

"I was brought up at a time of war and its prelude. My parents thought that the Spanish Civil War was the start of World War II, that America's isolationism was dangerous, that we should help out the Chinese. I'll always remember Ben reading *The New Republic* and after turning each page tearing off the corner and chewing it."

"My father deals in moral absolutes. Until now I never knew how fearless he would be in sticking his neck out for them. I disagree that his being a baby doctor disqualifies him to speak out against his country's Vietnam commitment. By being our public conscience, he makes us all bolder."

"Citizens of a country must make moral stands in respect to their country's actions. My father sees the United States behaving immorally. He feels Vietnam is a moral problem not only in the way which we wage the war but in the war itself. He considers it his duty to speak out against this. Many people

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think he is being traitorous. I disagree. By trying to save his country from itself, he is making a patriotic statement. He is not creating anarchy. Anarchy does not occur because people stand up and say: 'We cannot fight or follow.' Anarchy occurs when the government either ignores its citizens'

protests or acts as if paying attention but does not.

"Ben feels the President has betrayed those who supported him in the last election. My father's standards can be unrealistically high. He expects much from people. Unless he tempers this with realism, he experiences disappointment. It seems to me you can disagree with Johnson, but after the election he may have found him-

self having to escalate the war. That doesn't make him Machiavelli.

"Why aren't I out there marching with Ben? That's a very real question I ask myself: 'Is circulating nominating petitions for Eugene McCarthy enough?' The Joe McCarthy period was during my adolescence, when, normally, a young man makes his wild stand. That made me circumspect, and I never did make my wild stand. In the

late 1950's I was tempted to demonstrate in a peace march at Dayton's Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Judy and I decided against it. This was before Ben had been released, and we were afraid of embarrassing him.

"Our children know what Ben's doing. We will probably take them to part of the trial. It is an important event in their lives. They mustn't be separated. Judy and I are both perturbed. She feels that, should the war worsen many of us who have either stood with my father or behind him might be judged traitors if Congress formally declared war. My answer to her is that if you are too distressed with these concerns now, it freezes you from doing anything. The worst could happen. But even if he is branded a traitor, my father would continue his stand."

"My responsibilities as an American? Every American has a hard time making up his mind! I was crushed at being too young for World War II. Later, because of my psychoanalysis, I was listed as 4F. By the time of the Korean War, I was married and had kids. I suppose if Vietnam gets really bad, I'll be called up. I have a feeling the draft is better than a professional standing army. I imagine if I went I'd be a foot soldier."

"The Nuremberg trials are the strongest moral defense we have as a nation, but it's unlikely they'll carry much weight in court. We condemned those Nazis for not questioning the immorality of their orders. Today, how do you resolve your personal beliefs against what you consider your country's wrong? If the verdict for my father is guilty, it will be appealed. Sentencing will depend much on the mood of the country. We do assume there is a strong possibility of jail. But even if this happens, Ben won't waste away. He will write. My mother, not as contained or strong, will find it very difficult."

"Am I letting my identity as Michael Spock, Dr. Spock's son, stand in the way of my beliefs? I really don't know. But the question who should be doing what now is not only my problem but the entire country's."

"I am grateful to my father for having established a clear-cut set of moral principles by which to deal with people and to live. This is what I love him for in his Vietnam stand. I sincerely feel he is doing the right thing. And if I didn't agree with him, I would still be proud that, despite great personal risk, he speaks out for his beliefs. I would like to have his courage."

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