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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

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Consensual Living

"Consensual Living" parenting, which was developed in 2006 and now has many hundreds of followers, supposes that every family member's needs are equally valid and respectable. Even pre-adolescents are assumed able to understand their own needs and respect those of others. When little Kiernen, 3, of Langley, British Columbia, hits another child, his mom told Toronto's Globe & Mail in March, she does not invoke authority but instead asks about his feelings

and whether he'd like to express himself differently. If Kahlan, 18 months old, of Nanaimo, British Columbia, is grumpy at a time when her mother has made plans, mom says she is obligated to consider other plans. And when Savannah, 6, insisted on wearing her Halloween cat costume every single day for several months, her mom in Burlington, Ontario, just shrugged, since she recalled how contentious the morning dressing rituals were, pre-Consensual Living. ■

Not Consensual Living

► An Oregon, Wis., man was arrested in February after his 9-year-old son wrote a school essay about the time his dad shot him in the buttocks with a BB gun because he was blocking his view of the TV set.

► A 58-year-old man was arrested in Baltimore in February for allegedly stabbing his 19-year-old son after an argument over the son's refusal to remove his hat during church service. ■

The continuing crisis

► A 2004 burial in Allendale, S.C., is just now being investigated after relatives learned that the deceased, a 6-foot-7 man, was somehow laid to rest in a 6-foot-long coffin that was part of his prepaid plan.

► Authorities in Houston are investigating a funeral home that handles burial of paupers on contract from the county after, somehow, a 91-year-old male (who was supposed to be preserved for viewing) was cremated instead of the female who was scheduled.

► University of Kansas researchers, reporting in April, disclosed that a single tax provision in a 2004 law (allowing U.S. multinational corporations to avoid federal tax on foreign profits) gained a typical company \$220 for every \$1 the company

had spent lobbying Congress to enact that provision. Among the big winners was the Eli Lilly pharmaceutical company, which disclosed spending \$8.5 million to lobby for the law and gaining a tax break of more than \$2 billion. (The lobbying emphasized that the lower tax would enable the companies to create more jobs, but the Congressional Research Service found that most of the tax savings went to pay dividends or buy back company stock.)

► In a study of the last six years' admissions at hospital emergency rooms in the Austin, Texas, area (reported in April), 900 people were identified as using ERs six or more times in the previous three months, and nine specific patients had made a total of 2,678 visits in the six-year period. ■

Least competent criminals

► Timothy Grim, 39, was arrested in Shreveport, La., in April after swiping several garments from the rehearsal room of the Shreveport Opera and dashing off. The conductor and three performers took chase and cornered Mr. Grim several blocks away, still in possession of one part of a diva's outfit, which he immediately offered to sell back to the opera, and by the time police arrived, he had cut his asking price to \$1.

► A 16-year-old boy was arrested in

Centerville, Utah, in April as he roamed a neighborhood at night trying to break into several cars. The last one he tried was the private vehicle of a sheriff's deputy, who was still in it, in uniform and finishing a phone call after coming off his shift. After arresting the kid, the deputy reported that the boy had been so stunned when he saw the deputy inside the car that he immediately soiled his pants. Said the deputy, "You could smell him." ■

Recurring themes

In April, the city council of Vero Beach, grappling with the question of how much skin can legally be exposed in public, adopted the definitions that at least two other Florida jurisdictions use (and which were reported in News of the Weird). "Buttocks," for example, is "the area of the rear of the body which lies between two imaginary lines running parallel to

the ground when a person is standing, the first or top such line drawn at the top of the nates (i.e., the prominence of the muscles running from the back of the hip to the back of the leg) and the second or bottom line drawn at the lowest visible (sic) of this cleavage or the lowest point of the curvature of the fleshy protuberance, whichever is lower." ■

Safety first in Britain

► Recently, 118 local government councils conducted formal tests on their cemeteries' gravestones to see how susceptible they are to toppling over and hurting people, according to an April Daily Telegraph report.

► In April, a circus clown performing in Liverpool was ordered not to wear his classic oversized shoes because he

could trip and injure someone.

► BBC producers, wielding a "telephone-book-size" set of safety precautions while making a recent adventure documentary, ordered Sir Robin Knox-Johnston (the first person to sail single-handedly and nonstop around the world) not to light a portable stove unless a "safety advisor" supervised. ■

Oops!

For 15 years, police in southern Germany have been futilely tracking a female "serial killer" whose DNA (but little other matching physical evidence) was found at 40 crime scenes, including six murders. Only in 2007 did they begin to consider alternative theories, and in March 2009, a

state justice minister announced that the case had been solved: The DNA matched up in the tests because the cotton swabs used to collect it had been contaminated at the factory (but authorities still have not determined which female factory worker inadvertently supplied the DNA). ■